

2/28/07

PRESENTA-

TION:

STRENGTHEN-

ING THE

FAMILY

INITIATIVE

strengthening families

THROUGH EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

Partners

Alaska's State Leadership includes:

- Office of Children's Services, Department of Health & Social Services
- Alaska's Children's Trust Fund
- Teaching and Learning, Alaska Department of Education and Early Development
- Child Care Programs, Division of Public Assistance
- Women, Children and Family Health, Division of Public Health
- Resource Center for Parents and Children, Prevent Child Abuse America Affiliate
- Child Care Resource and Referral Network
- System for Early Education and Development (SEED), University of Alaska Southeast

ALASKA

HIGHLIGHTS

Significant SFI promotion practices, policy changes, or efforts:

- The SFI Leadership Team is made up of managers/decision makers from a wide variety of programs serving children.
- Five early care and learning programs piloted the Strengthening Families Alaska model. Teams from each program completed pre and post Self Assessments, attended an orientation and developed implementation plans. Programs were supported by face-to-face training events and continue to participate in a "Learning Network" which meets monthly to discuss family support issues and resources.
- Key staff from early childhood programs and child protection services have engaged in regional meetings to look at options for integrating key elements of the approach into existing policies, procedures, training opportunities and enhance their partnerships.
- Two Alaska Universities have begun incorporating the SFI framework into their early childhood and social work courses and practicum experiences.
- The Child Care Program is exploring possibilities for incorporating the SFI concepts into child care licensing.
- The Alaska Children's Trust is a member of the "SFI Learning Community" sponsored by the National Alliance of the Children's Trusts.

The Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Plan (ECCS) has integrated family support throughout the health, mental health, and early care and learning components of the Plan, including a recommendation to:

- Embed family support and parent involvement components (**Strengthening Families**) in early care and learning programs.

strengthening families
THROUGH EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

Developed by the
 Center for the Study of Social Policy
 Funded by the
 Jons Duke Charitable Foundation

EARLY YEARS MATTER!

- The ongoing interaction between early experience and genetics affects the architecture of the maturing brain and the function of the immune system
- As it emerges, the quality of that architecture establishes either a sturdy or a fragile foundation for all the learning, behavior, and health that follow

Jill F. Stuebel, M.D., Center on the Developing Child, Presentation 1/18/17

Relationships - the "Active Ingredients" of Early Experience

- Nurturing and responsive interactions build healthy brain architecture that provides a strong foundation for learning, behavior, and health.
- When protective relationships are not provided, persistent stress results in the activation of physiological systems (e.g., elevated blood cortisol) that can disrupt brain architecture by impairing cell growth and interfering with the formation of healthy neural circuits.

Jill F. Stuebel, M.D., Center on the Developing Child, Presentation 1/18/17

Early Childhood Adversity Can Influence a Range of Lifelong Outcomes

- Research on the biology of stress helps explain some of the underlying causal mechanisms for differences in learning, behavior, and physical and mental health that are associated with poverty, maltreatment, and discrimination




Jill F. Stuebel, M.D., Center on the Developing Child, Presentation 1/18/17

- **Positive Stress**- moderate, short-lived stress responses, such as brief increases in heart rate or mild changes in stress hormone levels

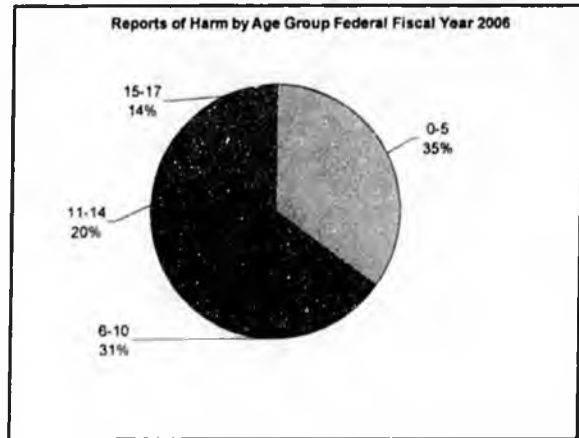


- **Tolerable Stress**- could disrupt brain architecture but is buffered by supportive relationships that facilitate adaptive coping



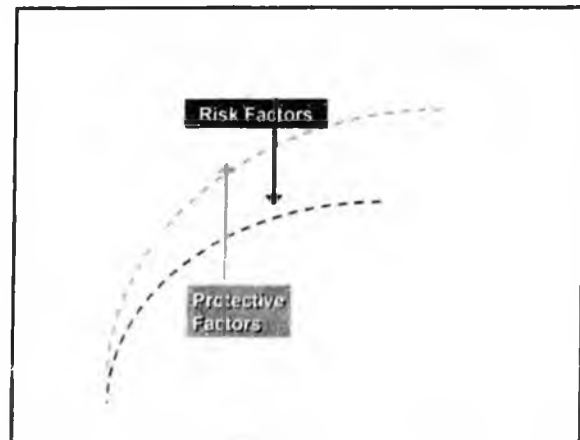


•Toxic Stress- strong and prolonged activation of the body's stress management systems in the absences of the buffering protection of adult support



Developmental Science Points Toward an Integrated Two-Pronged Approach to Promoting Health Development

- Universal and coordinated access to prenatal care, primary health services, and early care and education options to support families, facilitate child well-being, and detect problems in health or learning that can benefit from early intervention.
- Targeted and early provision of services for children experiencing toxic stress to reduce disruptions of the developing nervous and immune systems that can lead to later impairments in learning, behavior and both physical and mental health.



strengthening families
THROUGH EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

In the beginning, CSSP was seeking a strategic, feasible approach to child abuse prevention that was:

- systematic
- national
- reached large numbers of very young children
- would have impact long before abuse or neglect occurred

Paradigm Shift

- Old ideas:
 - "at risk" labels
 - highlighting bad parents
- New idea:
 - Go where the kids already are
 - Universal, non-stigmatizing, educational approach
 - Acting before anything bad happens

The hypothesis was that early care and education programs could be central because they offer:

- Daily contact with parents and children
- Uniquely intimate relationship with families
- A universal approach of positive encouragement and education for families
- An early warning and response system at the first sign of trouble



New Child Abuse Prevention Framework

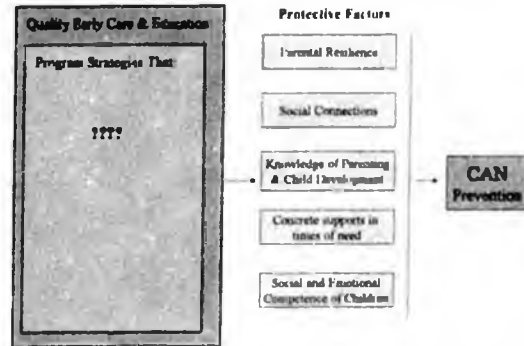
- Based on strengths (like family support)
- Linked to hard evidence (important to child abuse prevention advocates)
- Based on what early childhood programs already do
- Understandable to many partners

Protective Factors

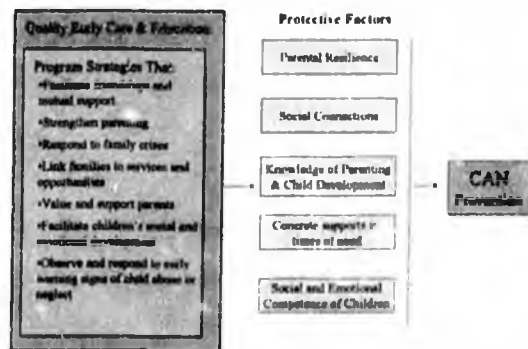
1. Parental Resilience
2. Social Connections
3. Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
4. Concrete Support in Times of Need
5. Social and Emotional Competence of Children



How Early Childhood programs contribute to prevention of child abuse and neglect



How Early Childhood programs contribute to prevention of child abuse and neglect



Early care and education programs can serve several critical roles for young parents:

- as a primary source of information and support for young families
- as a gateway to outside services or supports such as health or mental health services, transportation, and even education, housing and jobs
- as the key early warning system when families or children are in trouble.

A few persuasive States

- Alaska
- Arkansas
- Illinois
- Missouri
- New Hampshire
- Rhode Island
- Wisconsin



LEADERSHIP TEAM

Tammy Sandoval, Deputy Commissioner, Office of Children's Services, DHSS
Mary Rosenzweig, Executive Director, Alaska's Children's Trust Fund
Claudia Shanley, Systems Reform Administrator, OCS, DHSS
Shirley Pitts, Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Coordinator, OCS, DHSS
Paul Sugar, Head Start Collaboration Director, Teaching and Learning, DEED
Mary Lorraine, Program Manager, Child Care Programs, DPA DHSS
Stephanie Birch, MCH Title V and CSHCN Director, WCFH, DPH, DHSS
Colleen Turner, Executive Director, Resource Center for Parents and Children, Prevent Child Abuse America Affiliate
Candace Winkler, Executive Director, Child Care Connection, Child Care Resource and Referral Network Representative
Carol Prentice, Program Manager, SEED, UAS
Shen White, Parent Representative

Alaska's Goals

- To highlight and expand the valuable role that early care and education programs play in their efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect
- To actively engage the early care and education community in becoming key stakeholders in carrying out child abuse and neglect prevention strategies

- To enhance collaboration between the Office of Children's Services, Child Protection Program staff and the early care and education community statewide
- To link early care and education and child protection programs systems change efforts into a cohesive plan for statewide implementation

Pilot Programs

- Boys & Girls Clubs ANCH
- Open Arms FBKS
- Juneau Montessori School JUNEAU
- RurAL CAP Child Development Center ANCH
- Bristol Bay Head Start Program DILLINGHAM



PILOT PROGRAMS

- Completed Pre & Posts Self-Assessments
- Developed Implementation Plans
- Attended orientation and training
- Participated in monthly "Learning Network" teleconferences
- Received mini-grants of \$10,000

**AREAS WITH AT LEAST 30%
IMPROVEMENT on POST-ASSESSMENT**

- 5 - Facilitate Friendship and Mutual Support
- 1 - Strengthening Parenting
- 2 - Respond to Family Crisis
- 3 - Link Families to Services & Opportunities
- 4 - Facilitate Children's Social & Emotional Development
- 5 - Observe & Respond to Early Warning Signs of CA/N
- 4 - Value & Support Parents

The Leadership Team is:

- Facilitating discussion with key staff from early childhood programs and child protection services to look at ways to strengthen partnerships and options for integrating key elements of the approach into existing policies and procedures, and training opportunities.
- Working with early childhood training and education programs to use consistent vocabulary and goals regarding protective factors in their curriculum.
- Promoting the Strengthen Families model through presentations at conferences and workshops.
- Working to expand the Strengthening Families principles statewide.

**Policies that Affect Child Health and Development
Extend Beyond Access to Medical Care and
Education**

- If we really want to promote better outcomes for children, then we must apply the science of early childhood and early brain development in an integrated fashion to a broad range of policies....

Including welfare reform, housing, family and medical leave, adult mental health, and environmental protection, among others.

**Young Children and their Families
Need Champions**

"The time has come to address significant inequalities in opportunity, beginning in the earliest years of life, as both a moral responsibility and critical investment in our nation's social and economic future."

Jack P. Shonkoff, M.S., Center on the Developing Child, Presentation 1/18/07



THANK YOU!

a new, effective, and affordable
strategy for child abuse and
neglect prevention



strengthening families

THROUGH EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

DORIS DUKE CHARITABLE FOUNDATION/CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL POLICY

a new, effective, and affordable
strategy for child abuse and
neglect prevention



strengthening families

THROUGH EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

a new, effective, and affordable strategy for child abuse and neglect prevention

Contrary to the worry of some parents, quality early childhood programs may strengthen the bond between parents and children rather than weaken it – and when a child is at risk of abuse or neglect, an early childhood program that reaches out to parents may be the best prevention strategy. In 2003, staff from the Center for the Study of Social Policy (the Center) conducted intensive research on early care and education programs across the country whose exemplary work strengthens five protective factors known to be correlated with reductions in child abuse and neglect:

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

The Center's work is the first time that research knowledge about child abuse prevention has been strategically linked to similar knowledge about good quality early care and education to explore the role that early childhood programs can play in strengthening families and preventing abuse and neglect. The Center's research, reinforced by counsel from a national advisory panel of experts in child abuse prevention, early childhood education, and family support, has led to the development of a new framework for preventing abuse and neglect that recognizes a central role for early childhood professionals.

"Our work found that small but significant changes in programming and staffing of early childhood programs offer an effective new strategy for supporting parents under stress and preventing harm to children," said Judy Langford, project director. "These changes enable programs to respond quickly and effectively to help families that are struggling or children who are at risk of harm or who exhibit challenging behaviors," she added. "And the good news is that any program can make changes with a small investment in resources and planning."

The findings are supported by a recently released longitudinal study, conducted by Arthur Reynolds at the University of Wisconsin, of children and families served by a federally funded early childhood program in the Chicago public schools. The

Chicago program used resource coordinators to help parents receive the support and services they needed to care for their children at home and to foster social support among parents. The 18 years of research show that children who attended the preschool intervention program, compared to those who did not, had a 52 percent lower rate of maltreatment by age 17.

SPECIFIC STRATEGIES FROM EXEMPLARY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS THAT BUILD PROTECTIVE FACTORS:

Many existing early childhood programs already operate in ways that strengthen one or more of the five protective factors. It is the intent of the new strategy to help practitioners understand the greater impact of what they are already doing and to encourage them to supplement their programs in affordable ways so that they will be more powerful forces against child abuse and neglect.

The five protective factors that are at the heart of the new prevention approach are interrelated, and strategies aimed primarily at achieving one factor often contribute to achieving another as well. These are some of the strategies that the Center discovered in their research that contribute to child abuse and neglect prevention:

- Facilitate friendships and mutual support. Programs offered many opportunities for parents to get to know each other, develop mutual support systems and take leadership roles. Strategies included sports teams, potlucks, classes, camping trips and field trips, advisory groups, board leadership and volunteer opportunities. Special outreach to fathers and extended family members was common.
- Strengthen parenting. Programs offered many ways for parents to get support on parenting issues when they needed it—a class or a support group, opportunities to meet with teachers, family support workers or other staff, home visits, or resources from a lending library. Most programs had classroom designs or technology that allowed parents to observe their children easily. Both parents and staff described the importance of the everyday opportunities at the centers for parents to understand their children's behavior and respond to it more effectively.

Our work found that small but significant changes in programming and staffing of early childhood programs offer an effective new strategy for supporting parents under stress and preventing harm to children. — Judy Langford, project director

- Respond to family crises. In addition to day-to-day contact between teachers and parents that helped develop good relationships and support parents every day, good programs offered extra support to families when they needed it through designated family support workers or other staff who had the time, training, and expertise to connect families to the support they needed. All programs responded when families faced illnesses, job loss, housing problems, and other issues.
- Link families to services and opportunities. Programs offered parents links to job training, education, health providers and other essential services through their networks in the community. Most programs had family support workers on staff who helped to assess family needs and goals and connect them to services and supports. Mental health consultants were part of almost every program, helping parents and staff work effectively with children who had been excluded from previous programs for challenging behavior, and helping to destigmatize mental health services for children, parents, and staff.
- Value and support parents. Because the relationship between parents and teachers is essential to the programs' ability to connect with parents, support, training, and supervision of teachers to help them do this effectively was very important. Program leaders were involved in many day-to-day activities and were very accessible

to staff and parents. Teaching staff were encouraged to take initiative in their relationships with families and address concerns when they arose, knowing that they had back-up from supervisors and other staff within the program. Many staff members were especially recruited

- Facilitate children's social and emotional development. Many programs used "I Can Problem Solve", "Second Step" or some other curriculum focused on helping children to articulate their feelings and get along with others. Parents in many of the programs described how the curriculum influenced their perspectives on their children and their behavior toward the child when children brought home what they learned in the classroom.
- Observe and respond to early warning signs of child abuse or neglect. All programs trained and supported staff to observe children carefully and respond at the first sign of any difficulty. Programs used indicators such as frequent absences, missing payments, late pick-ups, or signs of parental stress as opportunities to proactively reach out to families and connect them with family support or other services. Special protocols for child abuse or neglect reporting allowed programs to provide continuity and support for families that were the subject of reports. Parents at several programs backed up the effectiveness of this strategy with personal stories of how the programs had helped them

alter situations that were dangerous for children and how they continue to be involved with the program. Most programs also developed ongoing relationships with staff at child protective services to ensure that children were safe and parents got the services they needed.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE FROM THE CENTER

To support early childhood programs in effectively addressing all five protective factors, the Center makes available the following resources, which will help strengthen existing program elements and identify affordable and workable additional elements.

- Descriptions of the exemplary programs studied and the ways in which they build protective factors against child abuse and neglect.
- A program handbook and self-assessment tool for programs that are interested in enhancing their ability to support and strengthen families.
- A website with information on the exemplary programs and other tools.
- Recommendations for early childhood infrastructure improvements that would allow early childhood programs to more effectively implement these strategies.
- Research review on protective factors and their links to reducing child abuse and neglect.

strengthening families

THROUGH EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

ABOUT STRENGTHENING FAMILIES THROUGH EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

This program was created with funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation in New York and managed by the Center staff Judy Langford and Nilufer Abbas. You can contact them at judy.langford@cssp.org or nilufer.abbas@cssp.org.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL POLICY

The Center for the Study of Social Policy promotes policies and practices that support children, families and their communities, improve the lives of low-income and vulnerable children, and promote the well-being of all children. The Center works in partnership with researchers, funders, state and local government, and other organizations to identify policy priorities, build coalitions, and develop and implement innovative solutions.

www.cssp.org

1575 Eye Street, NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20005

202 371 1565