



Happy- Strong and Empowered Families

Strategic Area Results:

- Families will have the five protective factors in place as defined by the Strengthening Families Model, i.e. Parental Resilience, Social Connections, Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development, Concrete Support in Times of Need, and Children's Social and Emotional Development.
- Families with young children will be decision-makers and leaders in their community.

Why is this Important:

- Early experiences that are "nurturing, active and challenging actually thicken the cortex of an infant's brain, creating a brain with more extensive and sophisticated neuron structures that determine intelligence and behavior...Children exposed to fewer colors, less touch, little interaction with adults, fewer sights and sounds, and less language actually have smaller brains." (*Ounce of Prevention Fund. (n.d.) Learning Begins at Birth. Retrieved from <http://www.ounceofprevention.org/news/pdfs/LearningBeginsAtBirth.pdf>*)
- Extensive research on the biology of stress shows that healthy development can be derailed by excessive or prolonged activation of stress response systems in the body and brain. Such toxic stress can have damaging effects on learning, behavior, and health across the lifespan. (*Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University*)
- Because parents are the most important people in the lives of their children, they play a critical role in helping them become healthy, well-adjusted and able to communicate and relate well with others. When we can help parents thrive in their role and understand and meet their children's needs, we are doing a lot to promote the healthy growth and development of their children. (*Strengthening Families Model*)
- Healthy attachment to a primary caregiver gives a child security which in turn builds confidence for future success and supports healthy brain and body chemistry.
- The family is the primary source of a child's emotional development.
- Being able to appropriately advocate for a child's needs empowers the parent/family.

- High parenting stress is an environmental risk factor for undesirable outcomes including poorer physical health, less effective parenting, and increased child behavior problems. *Parenting Stress and Child Behavior Problems: A Transactional Relationship Across Time*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4861150/>

What works:

Research has shown that these positive traits can strengthen **all** families, including those at risk for child abuse and neglect. Protective factors help families respond to challenges and difficulties in effective and positive ways. Building protective factors is best done through a strengths based approach with families.

(Based on the Strengthening Families Model www.strengtheningfamilies.net)

- Promote parent resilience.
- Build parental knowledge around parenting and child development.
- Promote social & emotional competence in children & families.
- Encourage social connections for children & families.
- Connect families to concrete supports in times of need.

Current Conditions:

- Poverty does exist in Colchester.
- More Colchester families are finding themselves in financial need.
- Increase in English Language Learners (as opposed to behind or low readers).
- Percentage of Children eligible for Free and/Reduced Lunch continues to rise

Strategies:

(Based on the Strengthening Families Model)

- Support parents as decision-makers and help build decision-making and leadership skills
- Encourage parents to manage stress effectively
- Help families value, build, sustain and use social connections
- Provide information and resources on parenting and child development
- Encourage exploration of parenting concerns and provide opportunities to try out new parenting strategies
- Help families to develop skills and tools they need to identify their needs and connect to supports
- Help parents foster their child's social-emotional development

- Deepen knowledge and understanding of the Strengthening Families approach and the Protective Factors Framework

Selected Actions:

- Support Meetings of the Parent Council
- Host People Empowering People (PEP)- Parent Leadership Training
- Host Circle of Security series
- Host parent workshops
 - Conscious Discipline Series
 - Financial Education Workshop
- Provide Play and Learn Group programming
 - Joyful Noises Play and Learn Groups
- Promote local support groups and town offerings from library and recreation department
- Continually expand and update information and resources on the C3 website
- Facilitate a Birth to 3 meeting
- Increase awareness of food bank, fuel bank, energy assistance, holiday giving services offered by YSS
- Provide information on resources for families
- Identify Home Visiting programs available to Colchester families
 - Nurturing Families Network 1-800-505-7000
 - Parents as Teachers (Early Head Start)
- Explore a Young Family Expo in the future? - (Perhaps in combination with a school event.)
- Explore Before/After School Needs of Families