Primary Prevention Frameworks and Strategies

OVERVIEW: *FRAMEWORKS AND STRATEGIES TO GUIDE PRIMARY PREVENTION OF CHILD MALTREATMENT IN WISCONSIN*

Children are the foundation and the future of our communities and our state. Children raised in loving and supportive environments have healthier relationships, a greater tendency to prosper academically and financially, and are more likely to become successful contributing members of society. Children live and grow in families and the prosperity or disadvantage of their families are heavily influenced by their community.

This brief represents the strategies and frameworks the Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board (Prevention Board) uses to guide its work. The Prevention Board uses these strategies and frameworks to support programming and system changes. Programs help children and families individually. However, the entire community benefits when systems take a family strengthening approach and address the root causes of family adversities, rather than just the symptoms.

FAMILY STRENGTHENING

Family strengthening is a family-centered approach which acknowledges the unique attributes of each family and provides them with the agency and tools necessary to identify and build upon their own strengths.

The concept of family strengthening emerged in the 1970s and corresponded with the development of family support services. Family support services seek to utilize this family strengthening approach to offer families the necessary opportunities, relationships, networks, and supports to raise their children successfully by involving parents as decision-makers in the needs of their own families and communities. (Family Strengthening Policy Center, 2004)

Family Support and Strengthening programs take this approach to support family skill building for the purpose of enhancing parenting skills, fostering the healthy development and wellbeing of children, youth, and families, preventing child abuse and neglect, increasing school readiness, connecting families to resources, developing parent and community leadership, supporting healthy relationship building, and advancing family economic success.

Family strengthening serves as a unifying thread among cross-disciplinary frameworks that can be used to conceptualize how disciplines and sectors can find common ground to best support children, families, and communities.

FOUR FRAMEWORKS

The overlapping contexts within which children grow each exert influence on a child's healthy development, and overall well-being. *Figure 1* demonstrates how the four frameworks referred to within this document help to depict the ecology of family strength – its sources and how they each impact and interact with one another and with development across childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, and beyond.

Figure 1 *Frameworks Address Overlapping Contexts that Impact Family Strength and Child Well-Being*
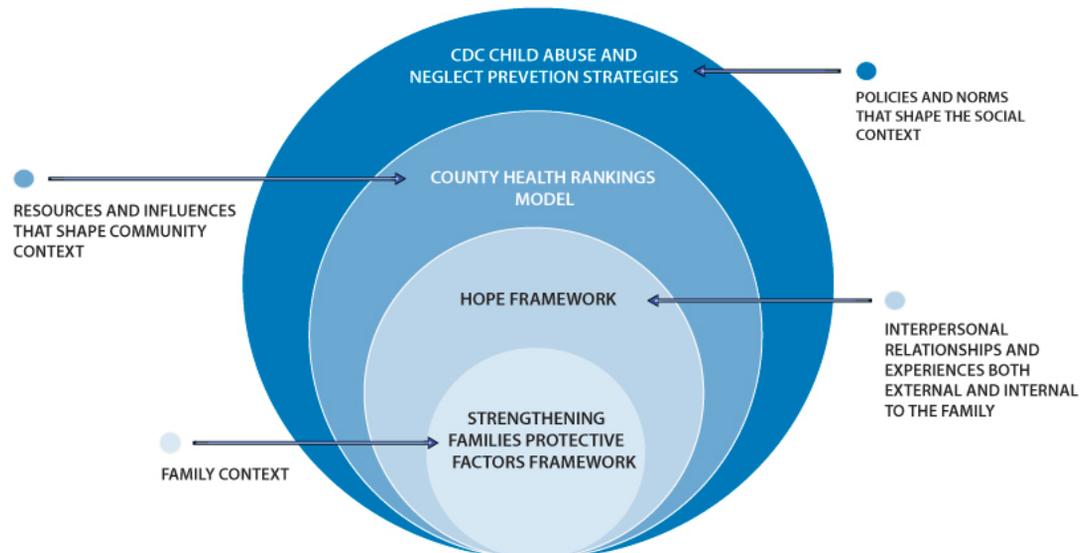
The Strengthening Families™ Protective Factors Framework

The most impactful and overarching influence on children's development and well-being is their family. The family exerts the formative influence on brain development during the critical period of early growth. Parent-child attachment forms the foundation of relationship skills. Family interactions foster intellect and social-emotional development. Caregivers also safeguard the physical health of children.

The research informed Protective Factors Framework consists of five characteristics, which, when present in families' day to day lives, strengthen them to promote the healthy development of children while also mitigating the risk of child maltreatment (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2023). A list of the five Protective Factors can be found in *Figure 2*.

The HOPE Framework

As a child gets older, they increasingly spend time outside of the circle of the family and immediate caregivers. The Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences (HOPE) Framework consists of four main "building blocks" identified in *Figure 2*, which provide children with positive childhood experiences (PCEs) that build resilience (Sege & Burstein, 2021).

Grounded in neurobiology, PCEs are the types of relationships and experiences that young people need to allow them to better withstand stress and manage adversity, enabling them to flourish as they grow beyond the home environment (Sege & Burstein, 2021). They include positive peer relationships and friendships, supportive relationships with non-familial adults, connection to school, sense of belonging, and being able to contribute to

Figure 2 *Key Components of the Four Frameworks*

The Strengthening Families™ Protective Factors Framework	The CDC's Strategies for Preventing Child Abuse & Neglect	The HOPE Framework	Social Drivers of Health within the County Health Rankings Model
The Five Protective Factors • Social connections • Concrete support in times of need • Parental resilience • Knowledge of parenting and child development • Social and emotional competence of children	• Strengthen economic supports to families • Change social norms to support parents and positive parenting • Provide quality care and education early in life • Enhance parenting skills to promote healthy child development • Intervene to lessen harms and prevent future risk	The 4 Building Blocks of Positive Childhood Experiences • Relationships • Safe, equitable, and stable environments • Social and civic engagement • Emotional growth	• Social and economic factors • Health behaviors • Clinical care • Physical environment

community (Bethell et al., 2019). PCEs are simultaneously protective when children face adversity and promote positive outcomes for children (Doom et al., 2021).

Families that maintain strong protective factors have better capacity to develop parent-child relationships and create opportunities that foster PCEs for their children.

Social Drivers of Health Framework

Social drivers of health, found in *Figure 2*, are the conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, and age. With a focus on health equity, this framework illuminates how social drivers of health shape "how long and how well" people live (University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, 2023).

Figure 3 *County Health Rankings, Social Drivers of Health Model.*

Adapted from "The County Health Rankings & Roadmaps." Retrieved February, 2024, from *https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/what-impacts-health/county-health-rankings-model*
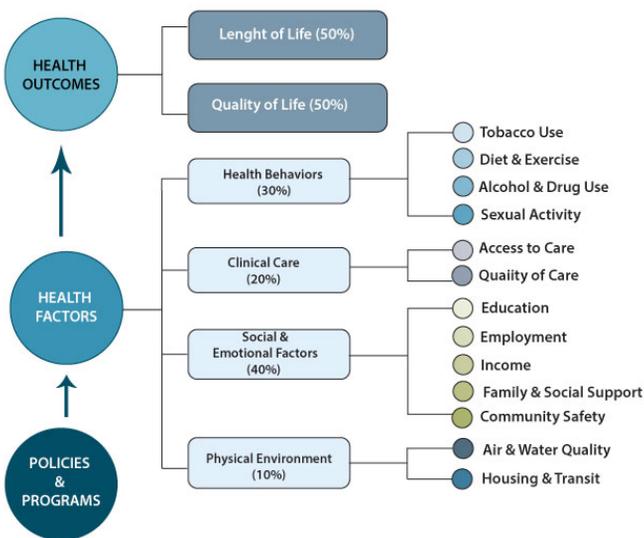
The county health rankings model in Figure 3 illustrates a broad vision of health, which incorporates the ways policies and programs influence social drivers to optimize or limit the length and quality of life (Blomberg et al., 2023) creating pathways which impact children, families, and communities in critical ways.

While we often think of health and well-being as related primarily to health care access, healthy lifestyle, or lack of illness, it is notable that half of the social drivers in Wisconsin that impact health and well-being are influenced by community context or conditions.

According to the model, 40% of the effect on health factors and outcomes is related to social and economic factors and 10% of the effect is related to the physical environment that surrounds individuals and families. Community level factors such as the availability of quality of education, access to housing and transportation, employment opportunities, and neighborhood safety will have as much influence on children's adult outcomes as access to health care and later health behaviors.

Additionally, those community influences upon children may be indirect in that a family struggling with social and economic challenges, living in an insecure or unhealthy physical environment, or parents engaging in health risk behaviors affects the stability of the family. This can leave children more vulnerable to adverse childhood experiences and interfere with the family's ability to ensure safe, stable, and nurturing environments for children (Reese et al., 2022).

The CDC's Technical Package of Strategies to Prevent Child Abuse & Neglect

This public health framework addresses the need for policies and social norms that support family strengthening at the societal level while acknowledging the overlap with other layers of the social ecology (Fortson et al., 2016). Using the evidence-base on primary prevention, the framework outlines five strategies, found in *Figure 2*, to strengthen families as a means to address risk factors for child maltreatment and to avert child abuse and neglect and other types of violence.

Strategy 1: Strengthening Economics Supports for Families

There is strong empirical evidence linking economic stability to increased family well-being and decreased child maltreatment (Anderson et al., 2021). This strategy has the greatest potential for broad public health impact on child abuse and neglect (Fortson et al., 2016). Strengthening household financial security is an essential approach to addressing this strategy and is of particular importance for lower income families. Family-friendly work policies are a second approach which applies to all families, regardless of income.

Strategy 2: Changing Social Norms to Support Parenting

Parents are faced with a plethora of information, advice, and opinions, often conflicting and including social indifference to violence. Yet, they are held to a high standard in terms of parenting practice and expected to meet that standard with little outside support and no need for parenting education. Changing social norms can result in a change

in social perspective from a focus on individual responsibility to collective responsibility for children, from harsh discipline to promoting positive, nonviolent parenting practices, and from expecting parents to struggle in isolation to encouraging and enabling them to seek help with parenting.

Strategy 3: Providing Quality Care and Education Early in Life

Quality childcare and early childhood education are protective for children when they provide safe, stable, and nurturing environments and rich learning opportunities that promote cognitive and socio emotional development. Both decrease the likelihood of challenging behavior at home, thereby also reducing parent stress and conflict which

can contribute to risk of child maltreatment (Mersky, Topitzes, & Reynolds, 2011). Early care and education that includes parent engagement can enhance parenting practices and attitudes, provide opportunities to develop social connections to other families, and increase family involvement in children's education (Reynolds & Robertson, 2003; Klein, 2011). Past research has suggested that states meeting the demand for childcare assistance (Klevens et al., 2015) and neighborhoods with more licensed child care spaces relative to childcare need (Klein, 2011) had lower rates of child abuse and neglect.

Strategy 4: Enhancing Parenting Skills to Promote Healthy Child Development

Parents cannot be forced to learn, but they can be motivated through recognition of their strengths, by their bond with their children, and by the fact that they have the capacity to parent well. All parents need access to high quality information, strategies, and supports. Some parents need more intensive support. Parent training programs and behavioral family interventions have been shown to positively influence family childrearing practices and children's behavior, which has been linked to prevention of physical abuse and neglect (Kaminski et al., 2008; Whitaker, Lutzker & Shelley, 2005). Other parent engagement and support strategies also build protective factors which promote healthy development while reducing the likelihood of maltreatment.

Strategy 5: Intervene to Lessen Harms and Prevent Future Risk

Primary prevention programs, services, and approaches address the root causes of child abuse and neglect, prior to occurrence, to avert harm. Because it is difficult to predict when and if child maltreatment will occur within an individual family, primary prevention approaches that address families broadly on the population level are most effective at reducing abuse and neglect. Primary prevention should be part of a comprehensive system which includes higher intensity services for families that need them. Families possessing risk factors for child maltreatment need access to secondary services and families where abuse has occurred require treatment services for both parents and children to prevention reoccurrence, heal trauma, and avert perpetuation in the next generation.

CONCLUSION

Implementing these four frameworks guides the Prevention Board in investing it funds, supporting its grantees, and collaborating with partners to provide families with the resources and supports they need to be able to avoid unhealthy stress and focus on providing their children with the attention and positive interactions needed for children to flourish and reach contributing adulthood.

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