

The literature review and the field wisdom gathered were used to inform and develop the Protective Factors Framework at the heart of Strengthening Families.

## Strengthening Families—an Evidence-Informed Approach

There is current strong national attention to the development of evidence-based program models. This approach requires programs to have completed randomized control trials, and to be replicated with high attention to fidelity (as close as possible to the version that was tested). In contrast, Strengthening Families has taken an approach that builds off of existing empirical research on what influences outcomes for children and families—as well as structured ways to test and learn from practice on the ground, including how the policy and implementation environment impact the ability to put research knowledge into practice.

- **Build from what existing research tells us.** Every day, universities and researchers are completing studies on human behavior, child development, family interactions and so on. Strengthening Families seeks to synthesize and make this knowledge actionable for those on the ground. By grounding the work in existing research the initiative seeks to develop an approach that is informed by the best existing evidence.
- **Provide guidance and a framework for adaptive implementation.** Tools like the self-assessment are important because they both have the flexibility to encourage adaptation and the structure to ensure that implementation strategies are grounded in the research that is the basis for the initiative. At each level of the initiative, Strengthening Families tries to support implementation through the development of tools that support this type of adaptive implementation.
- **Understand the larger context that will influence implementation.** The state pilot was a crucial part of the work. Too often program models are developed without a clear understanding of and response to the environment in which programs operate. By explicitly looking at the context of state implementation in a structured way, Strengthening Families was able to both identify levers in the state environment that would support programmatic implementation and identify potential obstacles.
- **Strategically use levers that can help to enhance fidelity.** One part of the focus on state level infrastructure is to strategically identify the levers that can be used to support underlying fidelity to the framework. For example, a state can help to ensure fidelity to the framework by modifying Requests for Proposals (RFPs) to require programs funded by federal Community Based Child Abuse Prevention funds to use the Strengthening Families self-assessment in their work and submit annual updates to their action plans. Similarly, a state can support and deepen the work at the individual program level by contracting with their Child Care Resource and Referral Network to provide coaching and individual technical assistance to programs on Strengthening Families implementation.
- **Create continuous learning loops with implementers on the ground.** Finally, the initiative learns from and with implementers at all levels in a structured way. Annual reporting helps to measure progress in consistent ways across all states in the Strengthening Families National Network, while monthly networking calls help to ensure that learning flows between states and can be harvested through regular conversations. As the work moves into new environments, it is often shaped by the experience of early adapters as well as structured efforts at the national level to build the knowledge base that will support broader implementation.