

# KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION BRIEF

Social Connections: A Protective Factor to Reduce Child Maltreatment

Strategies 2.0



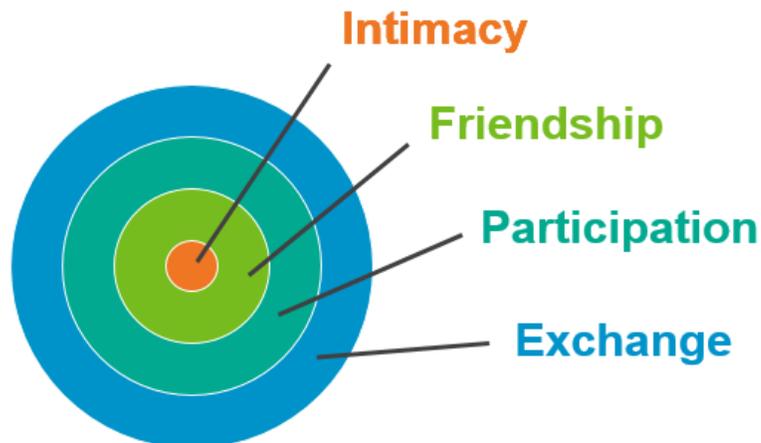
Healthy families are the bedrock of strong, vibrant communities. The Center for Study of Social Policy (2014) asserts that all parents need positive social connections with people and institutions to effectively manage stress and protect against child maltreatment.

A recent study found that mothers with higher levels of maternal support during the postpartum period reduced the chances of their children experiencing

child maltreatment at ages 0-8 (Tracy, Salo, & Appleton, 2018). However, for many parents, understanding how to identify unhealthy social connections and/or develop relationships that are positive requires the help of a skilled professional.

Family strengthening professionals can partner with parents to help identify and strengthen important relationships. Together, they can create a visual representation of their social connections using eco-maps, which illustrate all the people and institutions (i.e., systems) that are at play in a parent's life (Hepworth et al., 2017). Once the social connections are "mapped out", they help parents identify where the relationships fit within their circles of support. These vital assessment tools can point out which relationships are sustained or stressed in a parent's life.

Understanding that social networks have a significant impact on family outcomes, it is vital for family strengthening professionals to be intentional about helping parents mobilize new supports or repair stressed relationships. When strong social connections are in place, both families and communities can thrive.



*\*adapted from Etmanski, Collins, & Cammack, n.d.*



## Take Action

1. Encourage individuals working in the family strengthening field to help parents identify and strengthen positive peer relationships within their social network.
2. Learn how to integrate social connections into your practice and more by signing up for the Strategies 2.0 Family Strengthening Certificate. The certificate program is a combination of online and instructor-led courses centered upon a deep understanding and application of the Protective Factors. Enroll at [StrategiesCA.org](https://StrategiesCA.org)
3. Participate in Strategies 2.0 Learning Communities to learn from experts and other professionals in the field about how to strengthen your practice with families. Visit Strategies 2.0's website to find out more and enroll: [StrategiesCA.org/Learning-Communities](https://StrategiesCA.org/Learning-Communities)



## Strategies 2.0

Strategies 2.0 is a multi-dimensional initiative to help professionals and organizations make a bigger impact.

We train, support, and link professionals and organizations together to more effectively support families as well as build power to advance equity and opportunity in our communities.

## Resources

Center for the Study of Social Policy (n.d.) Making an eco-map.  
[cssp.org/reform/strengtheningfamilies/practice/body/HO-2.2-EcoMap.pdf](https://cssp.org/reform/strengtheningfamilies/practice/body/HO-2.2-EcoMap.pdf)

Safe and Secure, a project of Thera Trust. Circle of Support.  
[thera.co.uk/content/uploads/2017/04/Safe-and-Secure-Worksheet-4.pdf](https://thera.co.uk/content/uploads/2017/04/Safe-and-Secure-Worksheet-4.pdf)

## References

Etmanski, A., Collins, J., & Cammack, V. (n.d.). Safe and secure: Six steps on the path to good life for people with a learning disability. Grantham, Lincolnshire: Thera Trust.

Harper Browne, C. (2014, September). The strengthening families approach and protective factors framework: Branching out and reaching deeper. Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Social Policy.

Hepworth, D.H., Rooney, R.H., Dewberry-Rooney, G.D. & Strom-Gottfried, K. (2017). Direct Social Work Practice: Theory & Skills (12th ed.). Belmont, CA: Brooks Cole.

Tracy, M., Salo, M., & Appleton, A. (2018). The mitigating effects of maternal social support and paternal involvement on the intergenerational transmission of violence. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 78, 46-59.

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