

strengthening families

THROUGH EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

social connections

fact sheet for early care & education program staff

COMPONENTS OF SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

- Helping parents build constructive friendships and other positive connections can reduce their isolation, which is a consistent risk factor in child abuse and neglect. Isolation is a problem in particular for family members who are in crisis or need intensive help.
- Social connections build parents' "social capital," their network of others in the community—families, friends, neighbors, churches, etc.—whom they can call on for help solving problems.
- Social connections enable parents to develop and reinforce community norms about behavior. Norms against violence help reduce child abuse and neglect.
- Friendships lead to mutual assistance in obtaining resources that all families need from time to time, including transportation, respite child care, and other tangible help, as well as emotional support.

HOW EARLY CARE & EDUCATION PROGRAMS BUILD IT

- Potluck dinners with parents and children
- Sports activities for parents
- Parent education classes and workshops
- Helping parents connect with organizations and resources and resources outside the program (e.g. helping them find a church)
- Special outreach and activities for fathers, grandparents, and other extended family members

☞ ☞
“parents need friends”
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QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM STAFF

- How do you currently build social connections in your work with children and families?
- What new strategies might you try to build social connections?
- What organizational changes would support your capacity to build social connections in your work?

Strengthening Families Illinois, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. *Love is Not Enough to Keep Your Family Strong Campaign*. <http://www.keepyourfamilystrong.org>