

Strengthening Families: Concrete Support in Times of Need¹

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Parenting is a tremendous responsibility full of many moments of joy. But sometimes the rapid rate of a young child's growth and development can leave parents feeling a little overwhelmed. This Strengthening Families Series highlights six factors that promote positive parenting and protect against stressors and frustrations that can lead to harsh parenting: Parental Resilience, Social Connections, Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development, **Concrete Support**, Social and Emotional Competence, and Nurturing and Attachment. Each of these protective factors offers families and children some defense against distress. However, together they combine to create a solid foundation of knowledge, parenting skills, and support that can help families thrive during everyday circumstances as well as persevere during times of stress or crisis (1).

Overview

All families need help sometimes (2). In times of need, families will often turn to other family members or friends. While these types of informal supports are important, some needs may require more concrete (or solid) financial or material support. Concrete supports allow families to maintain their financial security and ensure that they are able to meet daily needs or unexpected costs (3). There are many state and local programs that provide concrete support to families who qualify.



When to Ask for Help

Asking for help can be a very difficult thing to do and some parents may not be aware that they truly do need help. Families often do not know what is available to them through various programs and government agencies. They may feel they have to solve problems on their own. Being able to recognize the need for assistance and being willing to ask for help can greatly benefit families. If the health and well-being of your children and family are at risk because of a lack of resources such as money, food, and medical assistance, it is time to reach out for help.

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What You Need to Know

It is important to know where to go and what to do to receive assistance.



U.S. Government–Florida Benefits

One way to determine what benefits are available to you and your family is through <http://www.benefits.gov>. This government-run website provides information on programs in every state. You can begin by filling out the questionnaire located under the benefits tab. This will help to determine what programs are appropriate for you and your family. You can also select the state option under benefits and search for opportunities within your state at <http://www.benefits.gov/benefits/browse-by-state/state/FL>. This option allows you to check the box of any programs or benefits you are considering and can help you determine if you are eligible to receive them. Some of the benefits you will find on this website are highlighted below.

TEMPORARY CASH ASSISTANCE (TCA) RELATIVE CAREGIVER PROGRAM

This program provides monthly cash assistance to relatives caring for dependent children placed in their care by the Department of Children and Families.

FLORIDA KIDCARE (SCHIP)

This program offers healthcare coverage to uninsured children not covered by any other healthcare including Medicaid.

FLORIDA HEAD START PROGRAM

Early Head Start, Migrant Head Start, and American Indian Head Start are all programs that seek to promote healthy child development and school readiness for low-income children from birth to age five.

FLORIDA SCHOOL BREAKFAST AND LUNCH PROGRAM

Through Florida Food and Nutrition Management and the Department of Education, healthy, well-balanced meals are provided at low or no cost for children in schools every day. Talk to someone at your child's school if you think you may qualify.

FLORIDA SPECIAL MILK PROGRAM

This program provides milk to children in schools and other childcare facilities that do not participate in breakfast and lunch programs.

FLORIDA SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC)

The WIC program provides health and nutritional services to low-income women, children, and infants. The program supplies food, nutrition education, and health care referrals.

FLORIDA SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM (SFSP)

This program provides nutritious meals and snacks for low-income children during the summer. Many of these children receive free or reduced breakfast and lunch during the school year, but when school is out they miss these meals.

CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT FUND

This program helps low-income families that need child care for children under the age of 13 (under 19 if incapable of self-care) because of work or school.

ACCESS Florida

ACCESS Florida (Automated Community Connection to Economic Self-Sufficiency) is an online program that helps families to access resources available in the state of Florida. The link to the website is <http://www.myflorida.com/accessflorida/>. Here you will find a pre-screening questionnaire that will help determine eligibility for various programs. This site also allows you to apply for benefits, check the status of an application, update with any changes, and view your current account. There is also information on how to find a customer service center or community partner in your area. Some of the benefits you will find here include the following:

TEMPORARY CASH ASSISTANCE (TCA)

TCA is a program that provides cash assistance to help low-income families become self-supporting. Cash assistance is

provided to families with children under the age of 18, or 19 if the child is still in secondary school full time.

FOOD STAMPS PROGRAM

Food stamps are provided for eligible low-income families to purchase healthy food. Food stamps allow families to have a nutritious diet and supplement income elsewhere.

TEMPORARY AID FOR NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF)

TANF provides temporary aid to low-income families with children in need of assistance. The goal is to provide families with assistance to live on their own and end dependence on government programs.

MEDICAID

The Medicaid program provides health care coverage for low-income individuals and families.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development provides resources and information on home ownership, subsidized housing, public housing, and housing vouchers. They also provide information and counseling on foreclosure avoidance and homeless resources. For free counseling and advice contact a housing counseling agency or call toll-free (800) 569-4287 or on their website at: <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD>.

211 Florida

A final source that can lead you to concrete resources and assistance is the Florida 2-1-1 Network, which can be accessed by simply dialing 2-1-1 from any phone or from the following website: <http://www.211florida.org/index.htm>. This network of 16 centers is a collaboration of the Florida Alliance of Information and Referral Services and the United Ways of Florida that provides information about concrete supports in your community. The Florida 2-1-1 Network is easy to use and is available 24 hours a day/7 days a week.

Other Local Resources

Within your local community, there may be other resources available, such as food pantries, utility assistance, and clothing assistance. Each community is different and these are just examples of possible resources. To find out more information about what is available in your community contact 2-1-1, local community resource centers, churches, and other service organizations.

Summary

The above resources are examples of concrete supports that are available to families and children. It is important to find out what resources are available in your community that can help meet the needs of your family. Families need resources to maintain balance and stay strong. Be sure to do your research and find out what resources and support may be available to you.

Web Resources and Information

Government Benefits – <http://www.benefits.gov/benefits/browse-by-state/state/FL>.

ACCESS Florida – <http://www.myflorida.com/accessflorida/>

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development – <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD>.

211 Florida – <http://www.211florida.org/index.htm>

Endnotes

(1) This work is based on the framework developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy, with more information available at <http://www.cssp.org/reform/strengthening-families>.

(2) Strengthening Families Illinois. (2007). *Love is Not Enough Campaign Brochure*. Illinois: Strengthening Families Illinois.

(3) Center for the Study of Social Policy. (2011). *The Protective Factors Framework*. Retrieved from <http://www.cssp.org/reform/strengthening-families/the-basics/protective-factors>.