



NCDHHS

North Carolina Division of Social Services Prevention Framework



Executive Summary

As a prevention-focused child welfare system, the North Carolina Division of Social Services (NCDSS) believes services and support that promote child safety and well-being along a three-level continuum will prevent maltreatment and strengthen a family's ability to thrive. This approach includes:

- **Primary prevention services and activities that proactively prevent harm from occurring to all children,**
- **Secondary prevention services and activities that assist families who have risk factors associated with child welfare system involvement, and**
- **Tertiary prevention services and activities that help keep families together and prevent recurrence of child maltreatment.**

NC DSS recognizes that creating a child welfare system that works with families to ensure safety, permanency, and well-being requires active participation and input from state and county child welfare employees, representatives from public and private family support agencies, and people with lived experience. To accomplish this goal, NCDSS created a Prevention Services Workgroup with membership to develop a statewide comprehensive Prevention Framework. This work culminated in the adoption of six shared principles that include overarching goals and broad, actionable strategies for use across all child-serving systems on the community, programmatic, and family levels.

The Prevention Services Workgroup focused their efforts on strategies that strengthen the following family protective factors, which align with the strategic direction of the federally required five-year Child and Family Services Plan:

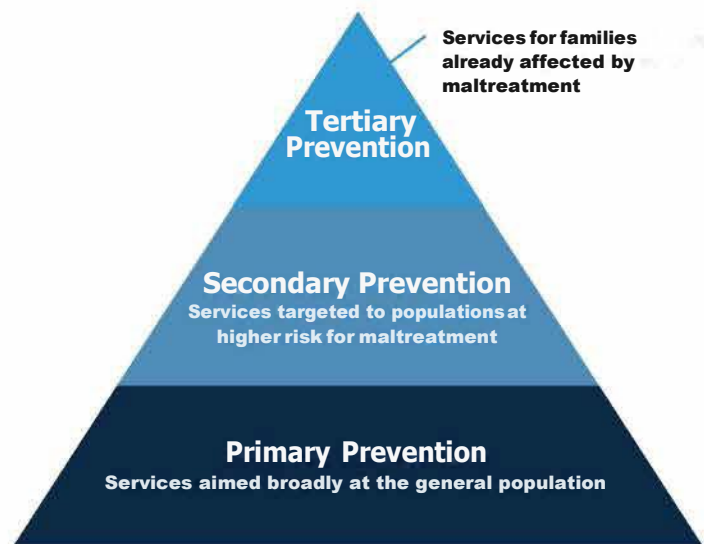
- **Increase parental resilience**
- **Increase social connections**
- **Increase knowledge of parenting and child development**
- **Increase concrete support in times of need**
- **Increase social and emotional competence of children**

We would like to thank the individuals whose perspectives and experiences shaped the creation of this framework and continue to support NCDSS in partnership and collaborative work. Together, we can work across the prevention continuum to strengthen families and provide enhanced support to all of North Carolina's children and families.

Introduction

The North Carolina Division of Social Services (NCDSS) Prevention Framework provides a roadmap for the state, regional organizations, and local communities to support, empower, protect, and strengthen families. The Prevention Framework and Principles that follow focus on primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention efforts, services, and interventions to prevent child maltreatment and enhance the well-being of children and families.

Primary prevention services or universal services are available to all families. Secondary prevention services are targeted at families with one or more risk factors that make them more vulnerable to child maltreatment. Tertiary prevention services are utilized for families where maltreatment has occurred, with the goal of preventing the recurrence of maltreatment. It is important to remember that the continuum is fluid. An organization may administer and deliver a program that spans across prevention levels.



Source: Child Welfare Information Gateway. (n.d.). Framework for prevention of child maltreatment. Retrieved from <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/prevention/prevention-continuum/?top=1484>

The most effective strategy to enhance the well-being of children and families is to strengthen and support families and communities. In doing so, families must be supported before they are in crisis. Effective prevention and early intervention strategies that encourage positive behaviors, reduce risk factors, and promote protective factors are vital to preventing child abuse and neglect.

Examples of prevention services along the continuum include public service campaigns, community-wide parent education programs, family support and family strengthening programs, parent education programs, substance use treatment programs, fatherhood programs, respite care, family resource centers, intensive family preservation services, parent mentor programs, parent support groups, mental health services, networks and collaborations, and parent and youth advisory boards.

Vision Statement

The vision of the NCDSS is that all programs will embrace family-centered practice principles and provide services that promote security and safety for all. This means that every child in North Carolina will grow up in a safe, permanent, and self-sufficient family where their well-being needs of all are met.

Purpose

This Prevention Framework serves as a resource for state, regional, and local communities in implementing the NCDSS Shared Principles. The framework will assist communities to increase awareness, effectiveness, alignment, and coordination of prevention efforts, as well as identify new opportunities to strengthen protective factors within families and communities. Protective factors are conditions that increase the health and well-being of children and families. They are attributes that serve as buffers, helping parents who might otherwise be at risk of maltreating their children to find resources, support, or coping strategies that allow them to parent effectively, even under stress. The five protective factors that enable children to thrive are outlined in the table below.

Parental Resilience	Managing stress and functioning well when faced with challenges, adversity, and trauma.
Social Connections	Positive relationships that provide emotional, informational, instrumental, and spiritual support.
Knowledge of Child Development and Parenting	Understanding child development and parenting strategies that support physical, cognitive, language, social, and emotional development.
Concrete Support in Times of Need	Access to concrete support and services that address a family's needs and minimize stress caused by challenges.
Social and Emotional Competence of Children	Family and child interactions that help children develop the ability to communicate clearly, recognize and regulate their emotions, and establish and maintain relationships.

Prevention Services Workgroup

In March 2021, The North Carolina Division of Social Services (NCDSS) convened the NC Prevention Services Workgroup to develop the prevention framework. This multidisciplinary workgroup met every other month for more than two years before finalizing the framework in June 2023. During this time period, the North Carolina Prevention Services Workgroup:

- **Developed a charter and vision that aligned its goals with the Child and Family Services Plan,**
- **Learned about Family First Prevention Services Act and the selected NC Evidence-Based Programs,**
- **Identified six principles for a Prevention Framework based on the nine Principles of Family Support Practice developed by Family Support America,**
- **Researched Family Resource Centers in North Carolina,**
- **Researched prevention frameworks, plans, and toolkits from other states, including Colorado, Georgia, Indiana, Ohio, Virginia, and Wisconsin,**
- **Coordinated with the Home Visiting, Parent Education Collaborative, and**
- **Expanded the principles to include goals, objectives, and strategies.**

In addition, the Family Partners serving on the NC Prevention Services Workgroup conducted several focus groups with the NC Child Welfare Family Advisory Council to solicit feedback on each principle from their peers with lived experience in child welfare. They presented these findings back to the larger Prevention Services Workgroup to incorporate it into the completed framework.



Adopting the Shared Principles

The Prevention Framework and Shared Principles should be viewed as the standards for all prevention agencies to employ and strengthen protective factors within families and communities. To assist agencies in adopting the Shared Principles, the below strategies have been identified as effective in achieving the goals of this framework.

These strategies are intentionally broadly stated to allow local communities to identify and adopt aligned activities that will meaningfully meet their community's needs. The strategies represent a variety of approaches, including family engagement, training, community outreach, and the use of data. Each strategy is presented under the single Principle it was intended to impact most. However, many of the following strategies will have a positive and direct effect on other Principles presented in this framework. The order of the strategies is not intended to represent any perceived rank of importance, and they should be viewed as an array of strategic actions.



NCDSS Shared Principles

The NCDSS Shared Principles were developed over the course of several meetings in partnership with the NC Prevention Services Workgroup and the NC Child Welfare Family Advisory Council. The NC Prevention Services Workgroup is a diverse group of state and county child welfare staff, representatives from public and private partner agencies, and persons with lived experience. The NC Child Welfare Family Advisory Council is a stakeholder group sponsored by NCDSS and supported by NC State University's Center for Family and Community Engagement. The Council includes diverse perspectives of young adult alumni of the foster care system and birth, kinship, foster, and adoptive parents.

The NCDSS Prevention Principles are based on the Principles of Family Support developed by Family Support America in 1996. They have been broadened to include a community, regional, and systems perspective.



Principle 1

Professionals, community members, and families work together in relationships based on mutual respect.

- **Goal 1.1: Strengthen the prevention network to enhance prevention programming and prevent child abuse and neglect.**
- **Goal 1.2: Professionals, community members, and families work together effectively.**
- **Goal 1.3: Utilize the prevention network in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of this prevention framework.**

Strategy

Professionals, community members, and families must work together effectively to develop a network that will strengthen prevention programming and prevent child abuse and neglect within their communities. Prevention networks must be utilized in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the prevention framework. The following strategies will assist agencies as they adopt this Principle.

- **Develop multidisciplinary networks of support that involve family partners, community-based agencies, and public organizations in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the prevention framework.**
- **Include individuals with lived expertise in leadership or advisory roles and compensate those individuals for their time when serving in advisory or leadership capacities.**
- **Provide training, resources, and support for individuals with lived expertise serving in advisory or leadership roles.**
- **Provide training to all staff who administer services, to ensure they have the skills and knowledge needed to respectfully engage families.**
- **Create Family Engagement Committees and Youth Committees to seek input and feedback in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of prevention programs.**
- **Strengthen communication and collaboration with other family-serving systems to increase efficiency and make it easier for families to access services.**
- **Cultivate relationships with community agencies to create referral sources for programs and learn about other local support services available to meet the needs of families.**

- **Embed prevention programs in communities and regions in a manner that strengthens the community-building process.**
- **Utilize events, such as Community Cafes, to understand community needs and recruit more families to participate in the partnership.**
- **Utilize assessments of child, family, and community needs to make referrals to resources that address the most prevalent needs.**



Principle 2

Families are valued as experts and resources to support the development of their own members, other families, programs, and communities.

- **Goal 2.1: Cultivate parent voice and leadership in prevention program development, implementation, evaluation, and agency governance.**
- **Goal 2.2: Employ recruitment and retention activities to engage families in the community in prevention programming.**
- **Goal 2.3: Assist families in accessing formal and informal resources to support family development.**

Strategy

Families must be valued as experts and as resources to support the development of their own family members, other families, and communities. Prevention programs should assist families in accessing resources that support this development. This can be accomplished by cultivating parent voice and leadership in prevention program development, implementation, evaluation, and agency governance. The following strategies will assist agencies as they adopt this Principle.

- **Engage family partners in the co-development of prevention program activities, such as agenda setting and co-facilitating meetings. Institute feedback loops to let families know how their feedback was used or why it could not be used.**
- **Provide funding and logistics to ensure incentives are available that minimize barriers to participation in prevention program development, implementation, evaluation, and agency governance, such as meals, childcare, stipends, and transportation.**
- **Include individuals with lived expertise in leadership and decision-making structures and ask them to select peer representatives in leadership groups.**
- **Develop quarterly meetings to engage families in program planning and implementation.**
- **Develop a Peer Partner Program to ensure a person with lived experience is matched with other families to help facilitate information sharing and understanding between the family and the prevention program.**

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- **Develop implementation plans based on local input, strengths of the community, and needs identified by families and community partners.**
- **Utilize exit surveys to gather information to improve programming.**
- **Ask families to define their support system and invite these support people to parenting services.**
- **Prioritize family voice when creating service goals and plans.**
- **Provide training to staff on quality, family-centered engagement to ensure those working with families have developed effective skills to engage families in conversations that support the family's psychological and emotional safety.**



Principle 3

Families have access to quality trauma-informed services and systems to prevent initial child abuse and neglect, repeat child maltreatment incidents, and entry of children into out-of-home placement.

- **Goal 4.1: Distribute services within the seven social services regions in North Carolina to ensure statewide access.**
- **Goal 4.2: Develop and expand quality family support and prevention services.**
- **Goal 4.3: Educate the community about the impact of adverse childhood experiences, intergenerational trauma, community and historical trauma, and resilience.**

Strategy

Families must have access to quality trauma-informed services and systems. Developing and expanding quality family support and prevention services through the distribution of services within the seven social services regions in North Carolina will help prevent child maltreatment and reduce out-of-home placement.

- **Utilize hubs of support, such as Family Resource Centers, as a service delivery method within the seven social services regions.**
- **Select evidence-based programs and evidence-informed practices that fit the needs of the community.**
- **Provide implementation support to prevention programs (to include family strengthening programs) to ensure model fidelity that strengthens the development and expansion of those programs.**
- **Develop partnerships with other family-serving agencies to promote understanding of trauma and its impact on both children and adults.**
- **Broaden public awareness activities to share knowledge and promote a common language of Protective Factors, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and resilience.**
- **Develop Community Resilience Fairs in communities to highlight resources and educate the public on trauma and resilience.**
- **Deploy models that focus on trauma-informed treatment, such as Community Resilience Model (CRM), within prevention programs across the state.**

- **Provide prevention program services in areas of the community that are easily accessible to families and are available to families at a variety of times and dates to allow for flexible family schedules.**
- **Offer concrete economic support when delivering parenting education and home visiting programs.**
- **Provide access to family strengthening programs in each region through both in-person and online accessibility.**



Principle 4

Prevention programs are flexible and continually responsive to emerging family and community strengths and needs.

- Goal 5.1: Model the Principles of Family Support in all prevention program activities, including planning, governance, and administration.
- Goal 5.2: Incorporate continuous quality improvement and evaluation into prevention programs.

Strategy

Prevention programs must be flexible and responsive to family and community strengths and needs by modeling the Principles of Family Support in all activities and incorporating continuous quality improvement and evaluation in prevention programming. The following strategies will assist agencies as they adopt this Principle.

- Monitor prevention program providers to ensure fidelity to established models.
- Agencies and organizations will develop a data collection process to monitor, analyze, and adapt programming at the local level. Data systems should ensure both security and privacy.
- Analyze process evaluation data to improve prevention programs.
- Analyze outcome data to determine if prevention programs meet the overall goal of increasing resilience and protective factors and reducing child abuse and neglect.
- Maintain data to share within the public and community that is presented in a way that is easy to understand.
- Conduct regular and ongoing client satisfaction surveys, interviews, focus groups, Parent Cafes, and community needs assessments to measure outcomes and adjust programming.
- Use coaching and technical assistance based on evaluation results when providing support to family strengthening programs.
- Engage families, served by prevention programming, on committees focusing on continuous quality improvement.
- Allow for adaptable funding and services so prevention programs have the flexibility to help families with unique needs.

- **Allow for flexibility within prevention programs to make necessary changes to meet a family's needs or ensure their needs are met by partnering agencies.**
- **Focus on meeting the urgent needs of families, as defined by the family, before making additional requests of the family.**
- **Designate consistent staff members for specific families to build trust and increase communication between the prevention program and family members.**
- **Administer ongoing assessments of families' strengths and needs within programming.**
- **Review assessments of the community's needs, strengths, and resources on a regular basis.**
- **Partner collaboratively with other agencies to identify the needs of children and families in the community and make sure they are being addressed across programs. Family voice must be included in the identification of needs and evaluation of services.**

Provide services to families that address needs and help build and strengthen protective factors.

- **Partner with unlikely allies in the community, such as barber shops, salons, libraries, or restaurants to stay current on community needs.**
- **Develop a formal approach to supporting local partnerships in modifying and adapting programs using science-based innovation.**
- **Hire staff and personnel who reside in the community or otherwise identify as members of the community.**



Principle 5

Community members value positive parenting and know how to support families to prevent child abuse and neglect.

- Goal 6.1: Build public awareness to support families to prevent child abuse and neglect.

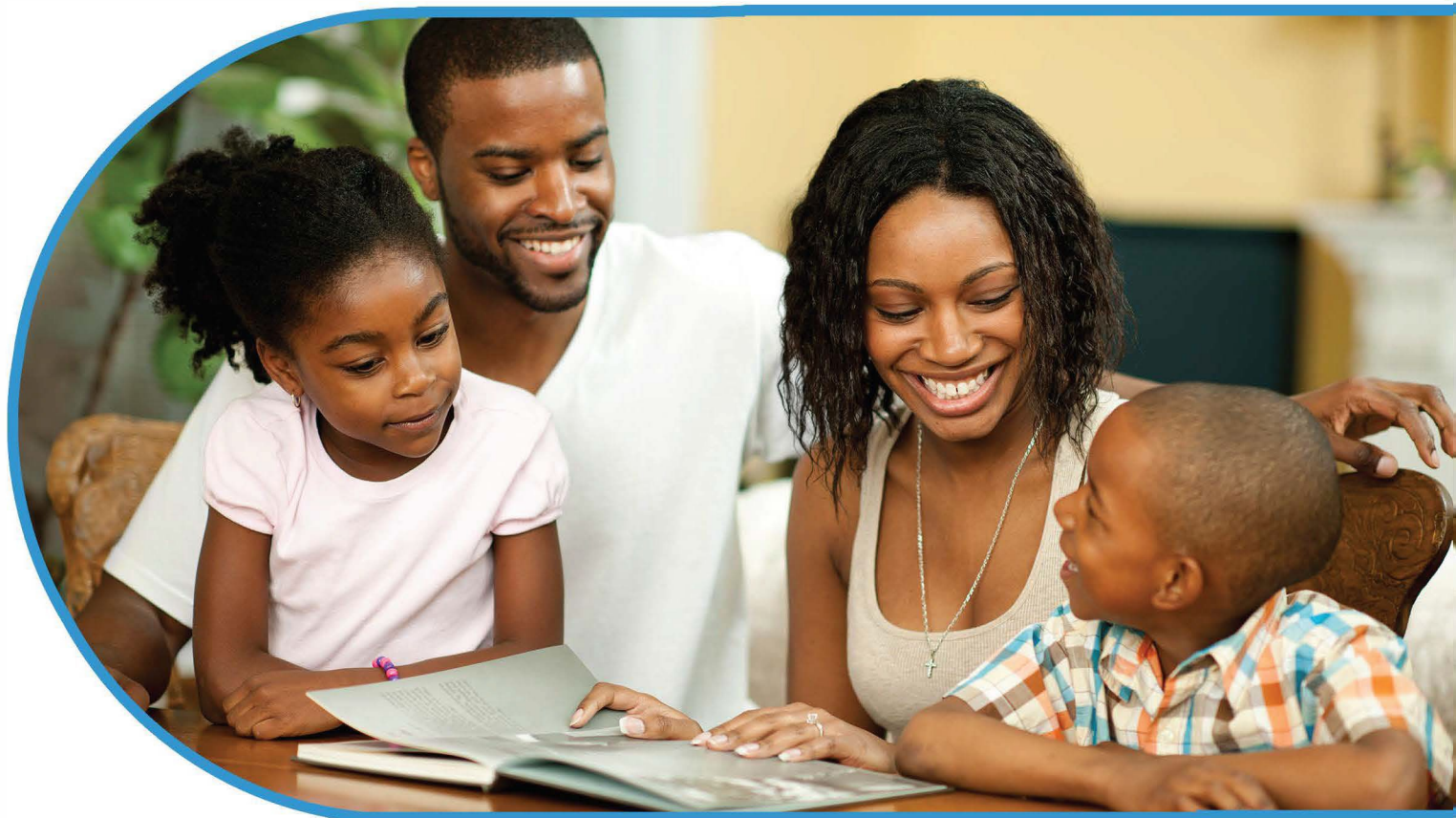
Strategy

Community members value positive parenting and know how to support families to prevent child abuse and neglect. Public education campaigns help build community awareness and change social norms to promote positive parenting, the value of asking for help, and supporting families. The following strategies will assist agencies as they adopt this Principle.

- Reframe seeking help as a strength.
- Encourage communities to offer support to parents and families by expanding trainings in communities, such as Connections Matter.
- Sponsor or participate in events to help community members regain a sense of cohesiveness, such as block parties, back-to-school events, and other family events to showcase community resources.
- Share information about positive parenting.
- Partner with pediatricians and public health departments to create community awareness about the prevention of child abuse and neglect.
- Develop campaigns to raise community awareness about the importance of supporting positive parenting. Utilize publicly available campaign toolkit and materials:
- Family Support Awareness Month (February)
- National Parent Leadership Month (February)
- National Child Abuse Prevention Month (April)
- North Carolina DSS Prevention Toolkit and Public Awareness Campaign
- North Carolina Kids First License Plates: Driving Prevention Toolkit and Materials
- Recognizing and Responding to Suspicions of Child Maltreatment Social Media Toolkit

- Develop campaigns to raise community awareness about the ways that everyone can support families and prevent child abuse and neglect. Utilize publicly available campaign toolkit and materials:
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- Connections Matter Campaign
- Building Better Childhoods Campaign
- Talking About Prevention Toolkit
- Integrate family voice into public awareness campaigns and messaging.
- Develop training and toolkits specifically for parent leaders to share messaging around positive parenting and supporting families to prevent child abuse and neglect.
- Identify and utilize family-friendly locations that can be used for information sharing and providing resources, such as libraries, pediatrician offices, department stores, and other community locations.

***Child Welfare Information Gateway <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/prevention/>
Center For The Study of Social Policy's strengthening families A Protective Factors Framework <https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/About-Strengthening-Families.pdf>***



Appendix A: NC Prevention Services Workgroup Membership

The Prevention Services Workgroup capitalized on the expertise, perspectives and voices of state and county child welfare staff, public and private partner agencies, and persons with lived experience with the child welfare system. The Workgroup was facilitated by NCDSS and supported by Public Knowledge®. Members included:

Member Name	Organization
Christopher Bryant	North Carolina Division of Child and Family Wellbeing
Larissa Berger	North Carolina Division of Social Services
Remy Burrello	Home Visiting/ Parent Education Collaborative (NCPC)
Karen Carmody	Center for Child and Family Health
Yvonne Copeland	North Carolina Division of Child and Family Wellbeing
Michelle Crawford	Wake County Human Services
Deborah Day	North Carolina Division of Social Services
Adrian Daye	Alamance County Division of Social Services
Erin Drew	The Family Place of Transylvania County
Ryan Estes	Coastal Horizons Center
Rachael Galanter	Exchange Family Center
Alexa Hamil	Orange County Division of Social Services
Howie Handorf	Wilson County Division of Social Services
Don Hicks	Wilson County Division of Social Services
Sharon Hirsch	Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina
Safiyah Jackson	North Carolina Partnership for Children
Catherine Joyner	Division of Public Health - Essentials for Childhood
Kelly Kirk	Child Welfare Family Advisory Council Family Partner
Rebecca Lambert	Alamance County DSS
Jason Mahoney	Wake County Department of Health and Human Services
Heather McAllister	North Carolina Division of Social Services
LeShana Moore	North Carolina Division of Social Services
Shani Nelson	Wake County Health and Health Services
Phil Redmond	The Duke Endowment
Kathy Stone	North Carolina Division of Social Services
Kristy Smith	North Carolina Division of Social Services
Laura Wasson	North Carolina Division of Social Services
Donna White	Home Visiting/ Parent Education Collaborative
Candice Williams-Collins	Child Welfare Family Advisory Council Family Partner