

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES™ ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR GREAT START FAMILY COALITIONS—MONTCALM

About the Assessment

This assessment helps volunteer community organizations determine how well they are implementing strategies to strengthen families. The assessment is based on findings from a national study that identified exemplary programs and organizations across the country. It allows community organizations to compare their practices with those of the exemplary organizations and identify areas for improvement. The assessment outlines how the protective factors can be supported through small but significant changes in practice. It is written for Great Start Family Coalitions (GSFCs) committed to working with and supporting the families in their community.

The concrete actions described in the assessment can be carried out in a variety of settings such as Family Coalition meetings, events and in trainings held by partner organizations. The strategies described can be implemented without making significant changes to existing facilities or raising additional financial resources.

This process *is not* about assessing the Parent Liaison or the Great Start Collaborative; the Strengthening Families Assessment *is* about identifying how the GSFC can build the Protective Factors in the community through small but significant “everyday actions” and encourages all members to freely express their opinions and perceptions. This assessment guides participants through a series of questions that look at the GSFC as a volunteer community organization, and helps the GSFC members identify things that they, as a group, can focus on to build a stronger GSFC.

Organization

The assessment outlines practices used by exemplary organizations to support families, organized around five protective factors:

- [Parental Resilience](#)
- [Social Connections](#)
- [Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development](#)
- [Concrete Support in Times of Need](#)
- [Social and Emotional Competence of Children](#)

Each section starts with a brief description of the protective factor and core strategies for building that protective factor. Assessment items are organized under each of these core strategies.

Strengthening Families Assessment Process

A facilitator that is highly knowledgeable about both the Protective Factors and the purpose of the Family Coalitions will support Parent Liaisons to prepare and conduct the Strengthening Families Assessment

with their Family Coalition. Each community completing the assessment will be assigned a facilitator who will conduct the Strengthening Families Assessment with the Family Coalition. Throughout the assessment process, your facilitator will be available to answer questions and provide support to ensure a clear understanding of the purpose and steps involved in conducting the Strengthening Families Assessment.

Participants

CSSP and the Early Childhood Investment Corporation (that led the creation/modification of this tool) strongly recommend that Family Coalitions include participants that represent the many perspectives and experiences of all families in your community. Group members include:

- Parent Liaison(s)
- At least eight parents who actively participate in the GSFC

Including a diverse group of participants in the assessment process allows the GSFC to benefit from a large variety of viewpoints and perspectives.

Conducting the Assessment

The assessment is completed with GSFC group members (Parent Liaison(s) and parents) who will actively participate in two meetings for a total of 6 hours.

At the first two meetings (2 hours each), your facilitator will lead the group through the assessment where members will provide responses to questions in the assessment and have open discussions about each of the questions as needed/desired. After the completion of the assessment, your facilitator will take the responses gathered from the group and produce a worksheet that provides an overview of the outcomes of the assessment and highlights the top five strengths and top five areas that were identified as opportunities for growth.

The assessment outcomes will be shared with the GSFC Parent Liaison and Great Start Collaborative Director. Assessment participants can share results with Family Coalition members and gather feedback about which items members would like to focus on and develop a plan to address in the next year.

At the final meeting (2 hours), your facilitator will lead the group through a planning process where the group will select one indicator from their top five strengths and one indicator from their top five opportunities for growth. Your facilitator will gather input from the group on what the parent led goals and activities will be for each of the two indicators.

After the Assessment

The Parent Liaison completes a worksheet that finalizes two Parent-led strategies from assessment and based on parent input, identifies and lists activities planned to be put in their 32p Application.

While the group chooses two areas to focus on first, the remaining areas of strength and opportunities of growth, identified through the assessment, provide opportunities for future work and continued conversations within the Family Coalition.

PARENTAL RESILIENCE

Being a parent can be a very rewarding and joyful experience. But being a parent can also come with its share of stress. Parental resilience is the process of calling forth one's inner strength to proactively manage stress, meet personal/family challenges and be able to function well. Parental resilience includes the ability to provide nurturing and supportive care to one's child, even when faced with challenges, adversity or trauma. The Great Start Family Coalition (GSFC) can provide a variety of resources for families to help build and support parental resilience. For example, the GSFC can:

- Demonstrate in multiple ways that parents are valued
- Honor each family's race, ethnicity, language, culture, history and approach to parenting
- Encourage parents to manage stress effectively
- Support parents as decision-makers and help build parents' decision-making and leadership skills
- Help parents understand how to buffer their child during stressful times

When supported by a community, these concrete Everyday Actions can help families reduce personal/parental stress and gain confidence in their ability to overcome challenges.

1. Parental Resilience: Assessment Items

How does the GSFC demonstrate that parents are valued?

Item	5: Stro ngly Agr ee	4: Agr ee	3: Neit her Agr ee Nor Dis agr ee	2: Dis agr ee	1: Stro ngly Dis agr ee
1.1 The GSFC strives to reinforce that parents are the first teachers and key decision makers in their children's lives, through <u>every</u> interaction and communication.	10				
Comments					

Item	5: Strongly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neithe r Agree Nor Disagr ee	2: Disagr ee	1: Strong ly Disagr ee
1.2 The GSFC engages families by:					
11.2.1 Providing an orientation for new members about the GSFC purpose, goals and objectives.	1		7	1	1
1.2.2 Using a variety of methods to provide quality information about early childhood.	8	2			
1.2.3 Gathering input from families in the community to support the work of the Great Start Collaborative (GSC).	4	5			
1.3 All family members are made to feel welcome at GSFC events.	10				
11.3.1 Families are greeted when they come to GSFC activities and events.	10				
1.4 GSFC members develop mutually respectful relationships with each other by:					
11.4.1 Taking time to get to know family members individually, by name.	1	1	1	6	
1.4.2 Listening and learning about their interests, current activities, hopes and expectations for themselves and their children.	1	4	2	2	
1.4.3 Recognizing and acknowledging each other's strengths, efforts and contributions.	1		7	2	
Comments					

How does the GSFC honor the race, language, culture, history and approach to parenting of its members?

Item	5: Strong ly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neithe r Agree Nor Disagr ee	2: Disagr ee	1: Strong ly Disagr ee
1.5 The GSFC members ensure that all families, are included in all aspects of the GSFC activities and events. Including but not limited to: <i>Family structure; socioeconomic, racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds; sexual orientation; age; gender; abilities; or preferred language.</i>	2	6	2		
11.5.1 Parents have opportunities to share skills, talents and cultural traditions with children and other parents.	1	1	6	1	1
1.6 An effort is made to ensure GSFC information and outreach materials are easily understandable and culturally appropriate. Materials are: 11.6.1 Translated, whenever possible, into the language(s) spoken by all families in the community served.	7	1	2		
1.6.2 Designed to reflect the culture(s) of the community.	2		8		
1.7 The members of the GSFC reflect the diversity of the community.	1	3	4	2	
Comments					

How does the GSFC encourage parents to manage stress effectively?

Item	5: Strongly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neither Agree Nor Disagree	2: Disagree	1: Strongly Disagree
1.8 The GSFC supports parents by acknowledging stress, and promoting the importance of parental self-care.	6	2	1	2	
1.9 The GSFC members know how to respond appropriately to family crises that come to their attention by: 11.9.1 Listening to families about difficult issues and helping them access additional resources.	2	2	4	2	
1.9.2 Maintaining confidentiality.	9		1		
1.9.3 Understanding parental stress and its impact on children.	7	1	2		
1.9.4 Promoting community agencies that provide services to families and children.	9		1		
Comments					

How does the GSFC support parents as decision-makers and help build decision-making and leadership skills?

Item	5: Strongly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neither Agree Nor Disagree	2: Disagree	1: Strongly Disagree
1.10 Parental authority is reinforced by:					
11.10.1 Understanding and respecting that there are different parenting styles and child behaviors in different cultures.	5	4	1		
1.10.2 Being careful not to contradict a parent in front of his or her child or other children.	8		2		
1.11 The GSFC supports its members in serving as leaders and decision makers by:					
11.11.1 Providing opportunities to volunteer and contribute to the work of the GSC.	8	2			
1.11.2 Encouraging and supporting parents in taking on leadership roles.	1	6	2	1	
1.11.3 Asking families for input about staff hiring.			1	1	7
1.11.4 Providing families with an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the GSC and GSFC.	3	4	1		
Comments					

Item	5: Strongly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neither Agree Nor Disagree	2: Disagree	1: Strongly Disagree
1.12 The GSFC promotes participation in activities by:					
11.12.1 Addressing topics, issues and skills that families identify as important to them.	6	3			
1.12.2 Designing activities to address the interests of different family members.	5	3	1		
1.12.3 Providing child care during meetings, trainings or workshops.	9				
1.12.4 Conducting outreach to families who might not otherwise participate.			9		
1.13 The GSFC helps to support the continued development of parent leaders by supporting attendance at conferences, leadership development trainings or special events.	1	1	7		
11.13.1 Opportunities to create mentoring relationships.	1	2	4	1	1
Comments					

Item	5: Strongly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neither Agree Nor Disagree	2: Disagree	1: Strongly Disagree
<p>1.14 The GSFC helps support parents' opportunities for leadership in community change by:</p> <p>11.14.1 Linking parents to events that help raise awareness of community needs.</p>	1	3	1	3	1
<p>1.14.2 Connecting parents to groups that work on issues related to early childhood.</p>	2	4	2	1	
<p>1.14.3 Ensuring that local, state and federal policy information is shared with families.</p>	2	2	3	2	
<p>1.14.4 Informing parents about groups that inform and shape policy at the local, state or national level.</p>	3	1	3	3	
<p>Comments</p>					

How does the GSFC help parents understand how to buffer their child during stressful times?

Item	5: Strong ly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neithe r Agree Nor Disagr ee	2: Disagr ee	1: Strong ly Disagr ee
<p>1.15 Resources are available about helping children in times of family crisis.</p>	5	1	3		
<p>1.16 GSFC members receive training and up-to-date information on dealing with stress and trauma including:</p> <p>11.16.1 How stress impacts the child's brain.</p>	1	4	2	2	
<p>1.16.2 Recognizing the signs of stress in children.</p>	1	4	1	3	
<p>1.16.3 How stress may impact the child's behavior and how adults can respond effectively to the child's behavior.</p>	1	4	2	2	

Comments	
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SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

People need people. Parents need people who care about them and their children; who can be good listeners; who they can turn to for well-informed advice, hope and encouragement; and who they can call on for help in solving problems. Parents' supportive social connections—that is, high quality relationships with family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, community members and service providers—help buffer parents from stressors. Good social connections also support nurturing parenting behaviors that promote secure attachments in young children. The Great Start Family Coalition (GSFC) can provide opportunities for parents to create and strengthen positive social connections by:

- Helping families value, build, sustain and use social connections
- Creating an inclusive environment
- Facilitating mutual support
- Promoting engagement in the community and participation in community activities

2. Social Connections: Assessment Items

How does the GSFC help families value, build, sustain and use social connections?

Item	5: Strong ly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neithe r Agree Nor Disagr ee	2: Disagr ee	1: Strong ly Disagr ee
<p>2.1 The GSFC hosts events or provides information about activities that give families the opportunity to socialize and make connections such as:</p> <p>2.1.1 Regularly scheduled meetings of the Coalition.</p>	7	3			

2.1.2	Affordable or free community events and family activities.	8	2			
2.1.3	Social media groups where parents can share information and interact with one another.		1	2	5	2
Comments						

Item	5: Strongly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neither Agree Nor Disagree	2: Disagree	1: Strongly Disagree
2.2 The GSFC promotes participation in program activities by:					
2.2.1 Calling, sending notes or conducting targeted outreach to invite new families to attend.	1	5	3	1	
2.2.2 Connecting on social media platforms through program pages or groups.	1	6	2		1
2.2.3 Offering support with transportation, child care or other barriers to participation.	2	5	1	1	1
2.2.4 Making efforts to connect families who share similar interests.		4	5	1	

2.3 At meetings, the GSFC discusses how stronger social connections can decrease parental stress.	1	2	1	6	
Comments					

How does the GSFC create an inclusive environment?

Item	5: Strongly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neither Agree Nor Disagree	2: Disagree	1: Strongly Disagree
2.4 The GSFC promotes positive social skills and community building by: 2.4.1 Welcoming families	5	5			
2.4.2 Inviting families to meetings and events.	4	5	1		
2.4.3 Learning about and embracing diverse cultures and backgrounds.		4	4		2
2.4.4 Establishing working norms that ensure that everyone is included and respected.	3	2	4	1	
2.5 The GSFC helps to reduce stereotyping and bias by: 2.5.1 Providing resources, materials and/or activities to the GSFC members on understanding and countering stereotypes and biases.		4	3	2	1

2.5.2	Intervening appropriately when working norms are violated and ensuring that any instances of prejudice are quickly and clearly addressed.	1	1	6	2	
2.5.3	Regularly reviewing GSFC materials, forms and documents to ensure that they represent the strengths of all families from diverse backgrounds.	1	3	5	1	
Comments						

How does the GSFC facilitate parent to parent support?

Item	5: Strongly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neither Agree Nor Disagree	2: Disagree	1: Strongly Disagree
2.6	At GSFC meetings and events, there is time allotted, and activities designed to foster parent networking and sharing.				
	2	4	2	2	
Comments					

How does the GSFC promote engagement in the community and participation in community activities?

Item	5: Strongly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neither Agree Nor Disagree	2: Disagree	1: Strongly Disagree

2.7	The GSFC members work to build good relationships with early childhood partners in the local community.	5	3	2		
2.8	The GSFC members actively participate in the work of the Great Start Collaborative.	2	3	5		
2.9	The GSFC encourages families to participate in community improvement or advocacy projects.		4	2	4	
2.10	The GSFC is engaged with issues of concern to the community.		2	6	2	
Comments						

KNOWLEDGE OF PARENTING AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Mounting scientific evidence points to the critical importance of early childhood as the period in which children’s foundations for cognitive, language, social, emotional and moral development are established. While no parent knows everything about children, all parents can benefit from increasing their knowledge of parenting best practices. Gaining a deeper understanding of child development—including early brain development—helps parents know what to expect from their child. Knowledge of parenting and child development can also help parents understand what children need during each developmental phase. The Great Start Family Coalition (GSFC) can help parents increase their knowledge of parenting and child development by:

- Modeling developmentally appropriate interactions with children
- Providing information and resources on parenting and child development
- Encouraging parents to observe, ask questions, explore parenting issues and try out new strategies
- Addressing parenting issues from a strength-based perspective

3. Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development: Assessment Items

How does the GSFC promote developmentally appropriate interactions with children?

Item	5: Strongly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neither Agree Nor Disagree	2: Disagree	1: Strongly Disagree
3.1 The GSFC encourages parents to learn about developmental milestones and to access developmental screenings and assessments when appropriate.	4	5	1		
Comments					

How does the GSFC provide information and resources on parenting and child development?

Item	5: Strongly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neither Agree Nor Disagree	2: Disagree	1: Strongly Disagree
3.2 The GSFC promotes and partners with organizations that offer parenting education classes that reflect best practices.	4	4	1	1	

<p>3.2.1 Classes and programs are delivered by staff with appropriate training and credentials for the program.</p>	5	5			
<p>3.2.2 The GSFC works to reduce barriers to participation by offering supports such as: child care, transportation or food when possible.</p>	8	2			
<p>3.3 The GSFC members provide support in the creation of resources on parenting and child development, to ensure that they are culturally appropriate and easily understood by parents.</p>	2	3	1	4	
<p>3.4 The GSFC connects parents to a variety of resources that can help them explore different ways of parenting.</p>	3	5	1	1	
<p>Comments</p>					

How does the GSFC encourage parents to observe, ask questions, explore parenting issues and try out new strategies?

Item	5: Strongly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neither Agree Nor Disagree	2: Disagree	1: Strongly Disagree
3.5 The GSFC works together to design and organize opportunities for parent led discussions that reflect on: 3.5.1 Parenting expectations and practices.	3	3	3	1	
3.5.2 Parent/child relationships.	6		2	2	
3.5.3 Effective interventions with children.	3	1	4	2	
3.6 The GSFC recognizes the unique parenting challenges experienced by families with children who have special needs by: 3.6.1 Being sensitive to parents' frustration, protectiveness, guilt, loss and other related feelings, and acknowledging the challenges families may be experiencing.	2	3	4	1	
3.6.2 Connecting parents with materials and websites, support groups, play groups and community resources specific to their children's special needs.	2	3	5		
3.6.3 Ensuring that parent/child activities are appropriate for families with children with special needs.	1	2	6	1	
Comments					

How does the Family Coalition reinforce parenting from a strength-based perspective?

Item	5: Strongly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neither Agree Nor Disagree	2: Disagree	1: Strongly Disagree
3.7 The GSFC connects parents to resources and supports that help them recognize their own strengths and the strengths of their children.	1	4	4	2	
Comments					

CONCRETE SUPPORT IN TIMES OF NEED

All parents need help sometimes. When parents are faced with very challenging situations, such as losing a job or not being able to feed their family, they need access to resources and services that address their needs and minimize their stress. This type of support helps to ensure that families receive the basic necessities that everyone deserves in order to grow. Providing concrete support also ensures that families have access to any specialized medical, mental health, social, educational or legal services they may need.

The Great Start Family Coalition (GSFC) can help parents to identify, find and receive concrete support in times of need by:

- Responding when families are in crisis
- Providing information and connections to services in the community
- Helping families to develop skills and tools they need to identify their needs and connect to supports

4. Concrete Supports—Assessment Items

How does the GSFC respond when families are in crisis?

Item	5: Strongly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neither Agree Nor Disagree	2: Disagree	1: Strongly Disagree
4.1 Parents are encouraged to seek support in the event of a crisis because:					
4.1.1 The GSFC promotes an atmosphere of caring and concern that makes families feel comfortable asking for help.	3	5	2		
4.1.2 Resource materials are regularly provided to participating families.	5	5			
Comments					

Item	5: Strongly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neither Agree Nor Disagree	2: Disagree	1: Strongly Disagree
4.2 The GSFC members support families in difficult times by:					
4.2.1 Offering to connect families to resources, including help lines, community resources or public agencies.	3	5		2	
4.2.2 Keeping family issues confidential unless given explicit permission to share information (except when potential abuse or neglect is an issue).	6	3	1		
Comments					

How does the GSFC provide information and connections to services in the community?

Item	5: Strongly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neither Agree Nor Disagree	2: Disagree	1: Strongly Disagree
4.3 Parents are encouraged to share information about family friendly resources in the community.	4	5		1	
4.4 The GSFC members know how to access up-to-date information about services and programs in the community that support the basic needs of families.	3	5	2		
Comments					

Item	5: Strongly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neither Agree Nor Disagree	2: Disagree	1: Strongly Disagree
4.5 The GSFC actively builds relationships with service providers by:					
4.5.1 Highlighting services and events at meetings, when possible.	5	5			
4.5.2 Using input from participating parents to identify gaps in the services available to families.	3	4	1	2	
Comments					

How does the GSFC help families to develop the skills they need to identify their needs and connect to supports?

Item	5: Strongly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neither Agree Nor Disagree	2: Disagree	1: Strongly Disagree
4.6 The GSFC encourages families to ask for help and use the supports that are available when needed by:					
4.6.1 Communicating to families that asking for help is a strength.	2	5	1	2	
4.6.2 Encouraging parents to understand their rights and to advocate for high quality programs and services for themselves and their child(ren).	4	1	2	3	
Comments					

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE OF CHILDREN

Early childhood experiences set the stage for later health, well-being and learning. A growing body of research has shown the relationship between young children’s social and emotional competence and their cognitive development, language skills, mental health and school success. The development of social and emotional competence—that is, characteristics such as self-regulation, self-confidence and social skills—depends on the quality of nurturing care, communication and stimulation that a child experiences. The Great Start Family Coalition can help to promote the social and emotional competence of children by:

- Helping parents foster their child’s social-emotional development
- Modeling nurturing care to children
- Promoting information about children’s social-emotional development
- Helping children develop a positive cultural identity and ability to interact in a diverse society
- Responding proactively when parent members share concerns about their child’s social or emotional development

5. Social and Emotional Competence of Children—Assessment Items

How does the GSFC help parents foster their child’s social-emotional development?

Item	5: Strongly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neithe r Agree Nor Disagr ee	2: Disagr ee	1: Strong ly Disagr ee
5.1 The GSFC introduces families to social and emotional development by: 5.1.1 Offering programs or speakers that promote the importance of a child’s social-emotional health and ideas about how to foster a child’s social-emotional health at home.	3	6	1		
5.2 The GSFC provides opportunities and connections to parent/child activities in the community.	6	4			
Comments					

Item	5: Strongly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neither Agree Nor Disagree	2: Disagree	1: Strongly Disagree
5.3 GSFC members respect the knowledge and expertise that parents have about their children's unique strengths and challenges when discussing social-emotional competence.	5	4	1		
Comments					

How does the GSFC model nurturing care to children?

Item	5: Strongly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neither Agree Nor Disagree	2: Disagree	1: Strongly Disagree
5.4 The GSFC events and activities nurture children and model nurturing for parents by:					
5.4.1 Demonstrating mutual respect between children and adults.	3	6	1		
5.4.2 Sharing information about how to encourage children to express their feelings through multiple avenues.	3	3	3	1	
Comments					

How does the GSFC promote information about children’s social and emotional development?

Item	5: Strongly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neither Agree Nor Disagree	2: Disagree	1: Strongly Disagree
5.5 The GSFC promotes programs and activities that support social-emotional development for children.	6	3	1		
Comments					

How does the GSFC help children develop a positive cultural identity and learn to interact in a diverse society?

Item	5: Strongly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neither Agree Nor Disagree	2: Disagree	1: Strongly Disagree
5.6 The GSFC welcomes and affirms the cultures of all families by:					
5.6.1 Implementing meaningful discussions regarding cultural differences.	2	2	3	1	2
5.6.2 Inviting families to define and express their ethnicity or culture.	2	3	1	2	2
Comments					

Item	5: Strong ly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neithe r Agree Nor Disagr ee	2: Disagr ee	1: Strong ly Disagr ee
5.7 The GSFC members are encouraged to enhance their own understanding and appreciation for different races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, languages and cultural expressions through: Being encouraged to share and reflect on their own cultural background, including self-awareness of biases they may hold.	2	2	3	1	2
Comments					

How does the GSFC respond proactively when parents share concerns about their child's social or emotional development?

Item	5: Strong ly Agree	4: Agree	3: Neithe r Agree Nor Disagr ee	2: Disagr ee	1: Strong ly Disagr ee
5.8 When GSFC parent members share a concern about their child's social-emotional development, the GSFC responds by:					
5.8.1 Promoting social-emotional screenings and assessments	1	5	3	1	
5.8.2 Connecting the family to resources that can support the child's social-emotional development.	2	4	3	1	
Comments					