

Understanding Family

Risk Factors

Prevent Family Separation

Core Principles of Family Strengthening

Scope of Family
Strengthening

Protective
Factors

Strengthening Families in India

Family Support
System

Caregiver
Resilience

Case Management

FRAMEWORK & GUIDANCE

Social and Emotional Competence

3-tier approach to Family Strengthening

Build Resilience

Community & Local Governance

Parenting
Skills



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Abbreviations

AB-PMJAY	Ayushman Bharat – Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana
BBBP	Beti Bachao Beti Padhao
BSSY	Biju Shishu Surakshya Yojana
CCIs	Child Care Institutions
COFE	Continuum of Family Engagement
CPC	Child Protection Committee
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
CTWWC	Changing the Way We Care
CWC	Child Welfare Committee
DCPU	District Child Protection Unit
ECD	Early Childhood Development
FAR	Families at Risk
FT	Family Therapy
GPDP	Gram Panchayat Development Plan
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
IACN	India Alternative Care Network
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
JJ Act	Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
PDS	Public Distribution System
PLCPC	Panchayat Level Child Protection Committee
PMAY-G	Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana – Gramin
PMMVY	Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana
POCSO	Protection of Children from Sexual Offences, Act 2012
PPS	Psycho-social Support
SHG	Self-Help Group
SILC	Saving & Internal Lending Communities
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
VLCPC	Village Level Child Protection Committee

Acknowledgement

This framework and guidance for ‘Family Strengthening’ interventions and practices in India has been a long-cherished vision of Changing the Way We CareSM (CTWWC) initiative implemented by CRS in partnership with Maestral International. This Family Strengthening Framework and Guidance is aligned with the principles and objectives of the National Policy for Children, the Juvenile Justice Act, and the flagship program *Mission Vatsalya*. These initiatives emphasize supporting families to care for their children, with institutionalization considered only as a last resort. In this context, this framework offers structured approaches for identifying, prioritizing, and intervening to strengthen vulnerable families. It also outlines methods for fostering collaboration with local governance systems and linking families to government schemes and services, ultimately aiming to empower both families and children.

This initiative has been made possible through the invaluable collaboration between CTWWC India, the India Alternative Care Network, and UNICEF India. The collective commitment of these institutions to advance the discourse on care reform for children and young people in vulnerable situations across diverse regional, socio-economic, and cultural settings has been instrumental in shaping this resource. These collaborative efforts over the past two years, through a structured and consultative process, have culminated in this resource at a dynamic time for care reform in India. I firmly believe that a resource of this nature can add significant value to catalyse commitment and action on family strengthening more widely. It can contribute to and help practitioners prevent family separation in vulnerable families at risk, build resilience in families who have experienced separation as they reintegrate with children, and strengthen families who provide family-based alternative care.

We extend our deepest appreciation to the **Steering Committee of the India Alternative Care Network (IACN)** for its leadership in guiding this initiative. The Committee’s vision and direction have been pivotal in co-creating this first-of-its-kind resource, which aims to inform both government and civil society practitioners in implementing structured family strengthening services across the continuum of prevention, reintegration, and family-based alternative care. We are particularly indebted to the members

of the Family Strengthening Working Group of the India Alternative Care Network for their unwavering commitment, expertise, and contributions. Special thanks are due to **Sandhyaa Mishra** (Miracle Foundation India), **Geetarani Lourembam** (Prerana, Mumbai), **Ranjana Srivastava** (Udayan Care, Delhi), **Nicole Rangel** (Leher, Delhi), **J.B. Oli** (Butterflies, Delhi), and **Bharati Ghate** (Sishu-Adhar – for the child, Pune), **Lena Dasgupta Basu** (Children in Need Institute, Jharkhand) for their critical review and feedback on the draft framework. We are especially grateful to **Vandhana Kandhari** of UNICEF India for her thoughtful and insightful foreword, which sets the tone for the importance of this work.

Our sincere thanks go to the team at **Butterflies**, a Delhi-based NGO, for conducting the desk review that informed the policy perspective of this framework. We also acknowledge the strategic leadership and engagement of **Vijayalakshmi Arora** (former Head of Program, CRS India), **Prabhat Kumar** (UNICEF India), **Kavita Mangnani** (India Alternative Care Network), and my colleagues **Manoranjan Dash**, **Sanjana Rajendran**, **Susmita Bhoi** and **Jomey Joseph** (CTWWC), whose guidance and commitment have been foundational to this effort.

Finally, we express our profound gratitude to **Beth Bradford**, Senior Associate at Maestral International and former Global Technical Director of CTWWC, for authoring this invaluable resource, *Strengthening Families in India: Framework & Guidance*. Her expertise and dedication have brought clarity, depth, and vision to this work.

As we present this framework, we do so with the hope that it will serve as a catalyst for systemic change in the way we care for our children — empowering practitioners, informing policy, and ultimately strengthening families so that every child in India can grow up in a safe, nurturing, and supportive family environment. This is not merely a document; it is a call to action, a shared commitment, and a step forward in realizing the right of every child to family care.

In appreciation,

Senthil Kumar Gurunathan
Executive Director
Catholic Relief Services, India

Foreword



Families form the bedrock of every child's growth, protection, and well-being. Across India, the evolving discourse on child rights and child protection consistently emphasizes the critical role that families play in shaping resilient, nurturing environments where children can thrive. It is within this context that the Family Strengthening (FS) framework emerges—not as a standalone initiative, but as a strategic, systemic approach to prevent family breakdown, reduce vulnerabilities, and restore a family's ability to meet the needs of its members, especially children.

This booklet on Family Strengthening Framework and Guidance is an effort to consolidate existing knowledge, interventions, and promising practices championed by governments and civil society organizations (CSOs) across the country. It is both timely and essential. As we collectively strive for a shift from institutional to family- and community-based care, we must recognize that this transition is only sustainable if supported by robust Family Strengthening mechanisms.

At the heart of this framework and guidance lies the need to increase accessibility to social protection schemes, empower communities through local governance institutions like Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), and ensure meaningful convergence across sectors. It also calls for leveraging data, technology, and storytelling—not just to inform policy and programming, but to humanize numbers and put in center the lived experiences of families and children. Equally critical is the recognition and support of the social service workforce, who are key drivers of systemic transformation.

UNICEF India along with India Alternative Care Network (IACN) and Changing the Way We Care is committed to carrying this vision of Family Strengthening forward. Through our collective strength— individuals, our partners, and communities—we will continue to amplify the voices of families, facilitate cross-sectoral collaborations, and showcase interventions that build safety nets and long-term support systems for children. We see family strengthening not just as a programmatic pillar, but as a foundational value in our pursuit of equity, care, and justice for every child.

This booklet is more than a repository of insights; it is an invitation—to policymakers, practitioners, and community leaders—to reimagine how we can work together in building a society where every child is raised in a safe, supported family environment. We hope it will serve as a guiding resource and a call to action.

In appreciation

Vandhana Kandhari

Child Protection Specialist
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Key Working Definitions

- **Alternative Care:** Any arrangement, formal or informal, temporary or permanent, for a child who is deprived of their family environment. With respect to the environment where it is provided, alternative care maybe, extended family care, foster care, other forms of family-based care placements, residential care provided in any non-family-based group setting, supervised independent living arrangement for children. For the purpose of this document, alternative care refers to only non-institutional care options.¹
- **Case Management:** The process of identifying, registering, assessing (in reintegration cases this includes tracing activities), developing a case plan, implementing the case plan (delivering or referring to services, facilitating and overseeing the placement of the child into the family environment), and ongoing monitoring and documentation.²
- **Care Reform:** Care reform refers to the changes to the systems and mechanisms that promote and strengthen the capacity of families and communities to care for their children, address the care and protection needs of vulnerable or at-risk children to prevent separation from their families, decrease reliance on residential care and promote reintegration of children and ensure appropriate family-based alternative care options are available.³
- **Care System:** The legal and policy framework, structures and resources that determine and deliver alternative care⁴; a sub-system of the child protection system.
- **Child:** “Child” means a person who has not completed eighteen years of age.⁵
- **Child Protection System:** A comprehensive system of laws, policies, procedures and practices designed to ensure the protection of children and to facilitate an effective response to allegations of child abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence.⁶
- **Family:** Those within the caring circle of a child; those providing daily emotional, physical and psychological care. This caring circle varies according to culture and circumstance; thus, the use of the term family recognizes that in many communities in India the care environment of a child is broader than the parents of birth or immediate family and includes the extended family, sometimes even non- biologically related. Families have primary caregivers who can be birth, extended relative, foster or adoptive parents, in some instances, child-, grandparent, or single parent-headed⁷. The term family can also include the families who are providers of family-based alternative care, such as the foster family.
- **Family Strengthening:** Programs, strategic approaches and deliberate processes of empowering families with the necessary capacities, opportunities, networks, relationships and access to services and resources to promote and build resilience, such that children are provided safe and nurturing care even when the family is under stress. These programs and processes depend on the active engagement of parents, caregivers, children, youth and other family members in decisions that affect the family's life.⁸

¹ Sec 29, UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care for Children, 2010.

² Changing the Way We Care. (2023). Case Management Resource Page.

Accessed at: <https://bettercarenetwork.org/case-management-for-children-reintegrating-into-family-and-community-based-care>

³ Better Care Network and the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance (2015) The role of social service workforce development in care reform. BCN: NewYork. P.47

⁴ <https://bettercarenetwork.org/glossary-of-key-terms>

⁵ Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection of Children) Act, 2015

⁶ <https://bettercarenetwork.org/glossary-of-key-terms>

⁷ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2019). Community Based Child Protection in Humanitarian Action: Definitions and Terminology. Accessed at: https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/terminology_and_definitions_reference_list_lowres.pdf

⁸ Adapted from: Family Strengthening Policy Center. (2004). Policy Brief No. 1: Introduction to Family Strengthening. National Human Services Assembly

- **Family-based Alternative Care:** The short-term or long-term placement of a child into a family environment, with at least one consistent parental caregiver; a nurturing family environment where children are part of supportive kin and community.⁹
- **Household Economic Strengthening:** A range of strategies to increase the capacity of vulnerable households to address their own basic needs and access essential services such as health and education.¹⁰
- **Life Skills:** Various skills regarding social development and living and coping independently. This includes self-awareness, problem solving, learning to negotiate, decision-making, creative thinking, critical thinking, effective communication, interpersonal relationship skills, conflict resolution, empathy, coping with emotions and stress management as well as money management, raising a family and running a home.¹¹
- **Parenting Skills:** The skills needed to raise children. Includes positive relationships with children, providing appropriate stimulation and home education, teaching life skills, managing expectations, non-violent discipline, managing parental stress, and communication skills.¹²
- **Positive Parenting:** Positive parenting training is typically led by a trained social or community worker and includes information on developing positive relationships with one's children, managing expectations, non-violent discipline, managing parental stress, and communication skills.¹³
- **Prevention:** A variety of approaches that support family life, strengthen caregivers, and help to diminish the need for a child to be separated from her or his immediate or extended family or other caregiver and be placed in residential or alternative care.¹⁴
- **Protective Factor:** The factors which enhance the likelihood of positive outcomes, increase resilience and lessen the likelihood of negative consequences when a family is exposed to risks or shocks, including parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need, and social and emotional competence of children.¹⁵
- **Referral:** The formal process of requesting a service for a child, young person, or adult, e.g. for psychosocial services, for placement, for education, so on. The request is usually made in writing using agreed formal referral form.¹⁶
- **Child Care Institutions:** Includes different forms of residential alternative care in India including children's home, open shelter, observation home, special home, place of safety, specialized adoption agency and a fit facility recognized under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015, amended 2021, for providing care and protection to children who are in need of such services.¹⁷
- **Resilience:** The positive capacity of children, young people and adults to cope with stress and adversity.¹⁸
- **Risk Factor:** Risk factors are conditions or variables associated with a lower likelihood of positive outcomes and a higher likelihood of negative or socially undesirable outcomes.¹⁹

⁹ <https://bettercarenetwork.org/glossary-of-key-terms>

¹⁰ OVC Support. <https://ovcsupport.org/resource/economic-strengthening/>

¹¹ <https://bettercarenetwork.org/glossary-of-key-terms>

¹² Center for the Study of Social Policy: <https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/ProtectiveFactorsActionSheets.pdf>

¹³ UNICEF (2020). Designing Parenting Programmes for Violence Prevention. Accessed at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/77866/file/Parenting-Guidance-Note.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://bettercarenetwork.org/glossary-of-key-terms>

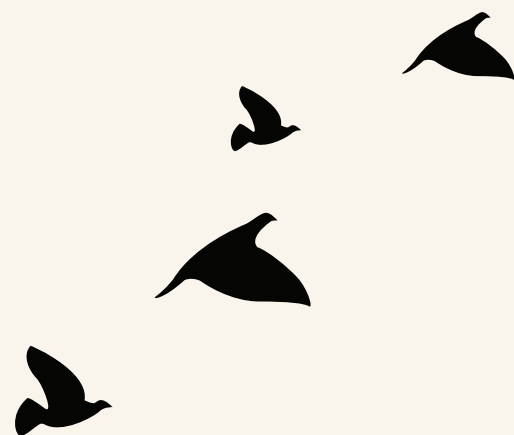
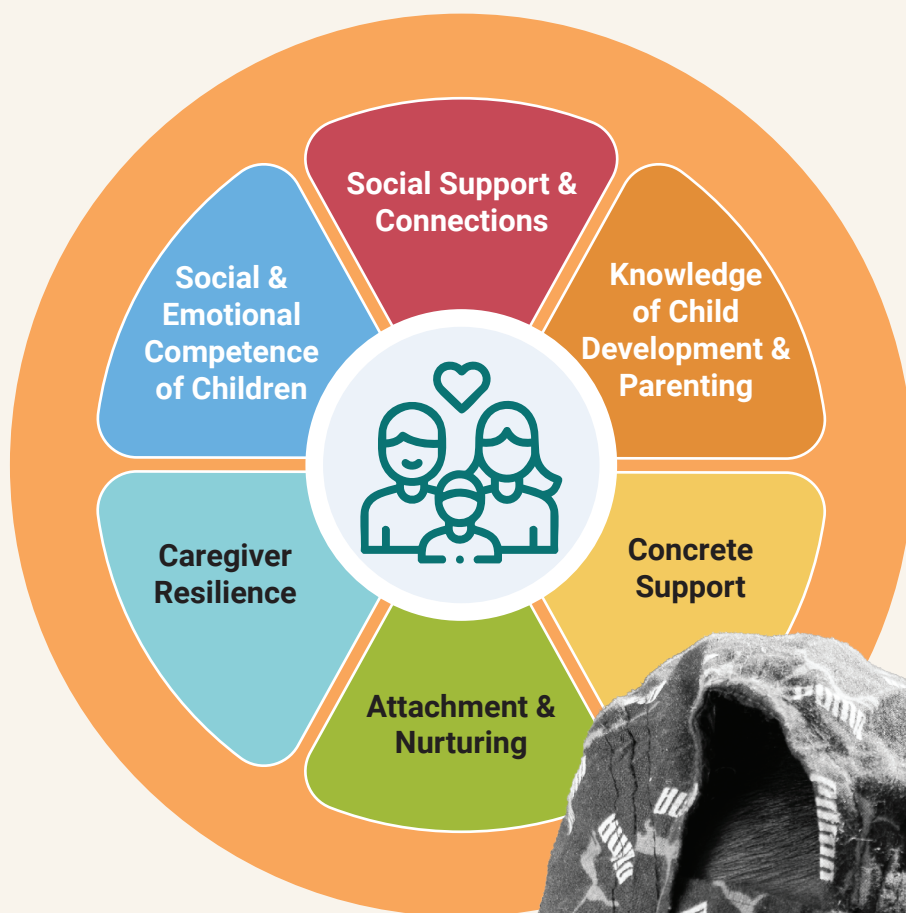
¹⁵ Centre for the Study of Social Policy

¹⁶ <https://bettercarenetwork.org/glossary-of-key-terms>

¹⁷ Sec.2(21) of JJ Act 2015, amended 2021.

¹⁸ <https://bettercarenetwork.org/glossary-of-key-terms>

¹⁹ WHO Definitions as cited in Changing the Way We Care. (2023). Family Strengthening Framework. Accessed at: https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/family_strengthening_framework_final_29sep2023_1.pdf



Executive Summary

Family refers to those within the caring circle of a child; those providing daily emotional, physical and psychological care. This caring circle varies according to culture and circumstance; thus, the use of the term family recognizes that in many communities in India the care environment of a child is broader than the parents of birth or immediate family and includes the extended family, sometimes even non-biologically related. The term family can also include the families who are providers of family-based alternative care, such as the foster family.

Children do well when their families do well, and families do better when they live in supportive neighborhoods and communities. All families can benefit from support from time to time, whether to remain resilient in the face of crisis or adversity, to learn good parenting techniques, or to weather a change in family dynamics. Support can help families stay strong and intact; thus, family strengthening should be an integral part of care reform. In fact, the U.N. Guidelines on the Alternative Care of Children (2009) states, *the family being the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth, well-being and protection of children, efforts should primarily be directed to enabling the child to remain in or return to the care of his/her parents, or when appropriate, other close family members.*

In India, millions of children live outside of parental care and hundreds of thousands reside in Child Care Institutions (CCIs). The majority of children living in CCIs have at least one living parent. In mid-2022 the IACN documented the reasons children end up in all forms of alternative care, finding that poverty and lack of access to basics like food, clothing, adequate shelter and education are the main reasons. The factors that lead to a family-child separation and institutionalization are often the same factors that make it hard for children to reintegrate into family and community. Without addressing these underlying factors and strengthening families, the risk of re-separation remains.

The *Strengthening Families in India: Framework and Guidance* is a framework for understanding and defining components of family strengthening designed for government and non-government social service and child protection workers.

Family strengthening has three primary aims: 1) to prevent family separation before it occurs in vulnerable families at risk; 2) to build resilience in families who have experienced separation as they reintegrate with children (as in prevent re-separation); and 3) to strengthen families who provide family-based alternative care.

Family strengthening is a process to enhance the capacity of parents, caregivers and children, with the goal to build positive relationships within families and to enable access to social protection services, critical to addressing the factors that lead to separation and alternative care placement; and a preventive measure whereby vulnerable families, those facing poverty, social discrimination and any other form of distress, are supported to build protective factors. The family strengthening approach is cross-cutting and targets families at risk of separation, families facing imminent separation, often through involvement of government protection workers or other mandated bodies, and families who are already separated and are preparing for reunification or are in the process of reintegration.

The family strengthening framework is built around an understanding of these combination of heightened risk factors, barriers and reduced protective factors that can make some families separate from their children. Risk factors are conditions or variables associated with a lower likelihood of positive outcomes and a higher likelihood of negative or socially undesirable outcomes. Addressing risk factors is usually not enough. Research also suggests that building up the family's protective factors ([Refer to Figure 4](#)) is critical. There is no one type of family living precariously, just as there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Some families require more intensive services than others. Local context will also vary.

The family strengthening framework and guidance helps practitioners to understand the tiers of family strengthening, entry points for family strengthening services, what families should benefit and when, how to identify risks in vulnerable families, what agencies and organizations provide family strengthen services, and processes for referrals and enrolling. It provides detailed information on the various schemes* available to families in India.

*The schemes mentioned in this document is suggestive. As schemes and services keep changing, readers are requested to refer the latest versions as applicable.

Introduction

Decades of research¹ have resulted in a growing global understanding that institutional care of children is a significant problem as well as growing interest in strengthening systems that protect and care for children². These strengthened systems are led by governments and, in keeping with international conventions and frameworks such as UNCRC and the United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, should be supportive of family care. Non-governmental organizations, civil society and, increasingly, youth in care and care leavers have been key partners of care reform by piloting and modeling family strengthening approaches, family-based alternative care; developing and promoting standards of practice, guidance and training; and building capacity of governments, communities and families.

Children do well when their families do well, and families do better when they live in supportive neighborhoods and communities. All families can benefit from support from time to time, whether to remain resilient in the face of crisis or adversity, to learn good parenting techniques, or to weather a change in family dynamics. Support can help families stay strong and intact; thus, family strengthening should be an integral part of care reform. The visual illustrates the key components of care reform. Family strengthening cross cuts all of them, namely:

- **prevention and family preservation** includes services and resources to strengthen families before separation occurs, as well as strengthening the families into which children are being reintegrated;

- alternative care should be family-based whenever in the child's best interest, and families providing it should be supported and strengthened. As children are deinstitutionalised, families must be strengthened for successful reintegration.
- institutions, themselves, transformed into services that support families. The following pages introduce a family strengthening framework.



Figure 1: Care Reform Model

¹ van IJzendoorn, M. H., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J., Duschinsky, R., Fox, N. A., Goldman, P. S., Gunnar, M. R., ... & Sonuga-Barke, E. J. (2020). Institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation of children 1: a systematic and integrative review of evidence regarding effects on development. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 7(8), 703-720. Accessed at: <https://www.thelancet.com/commissions/deinstitutionalisation>

² Care Reform refers to the changes to the systems and mechanisms that promote and strengthen the capacity of families and communities to care for their children, address the care and protection needs of vulnerable or at-risk children to prevent separation from their families, decrease reliance on residential care and promote reintegration of children and ensure appropriate family-based alternative care options are available for children who do need to be separated, however temporary.

Understanding of Family

Family refers to those within the caring circle of a child; those providing daily emotional, physical and psychological care. This caring circle varies according to culture and circumstance; thus, the use of the term family recognizes that in many communities in India the care environment of a child is broader than the parents of birth or immediate family and includes the extended family, sometimes even non-biologically related. Families have primary caregivers who can be birth, extended relative, foster or adoptive parents, in some instances, child, grandparent, or single parent-headed.³ The term family can also include the families who are providers of family-based alternative care, such as the foster family.

The U.N. Guidelines on the Alternative Care of Children states,



The family being the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth, well-being and protection of children, efforts should primarily be directed to enabling the child to remain in or return to the care of his/her parents, or when appropriate, other close family members.⁴

The statistics indicate that there are approximately 44.8 crores children below the age of 18 years in India⁵, accounting for 36.7% of total population of the country⁶. While international report estimates that millions of children are reported to be living outside of parental care⁷, Government of India's national mapping of children in institutional care in the year 2018 projects 370,000 children reside in over 9,500 Child Care Institutions (CCIs) in the country⁸. At present a few thousand children stay in over 4000 Child Care Institutions⁹, shows the promising efforts and investment that have led to a decline in institutional care and a growing trend of family and family-based care

in the country. However, the pain point is that the majority of children living in CCIs have at least one living parent and have been separated due to push and pull factors, including but not limited to poverty and access to basics like food, clothing, adequate shelter and education. The factors that lead to a family-child separation and institutionalization are often the same factors that make it hard for children to reintegrate into family and community. Without addressing these underlying factors and strengthening families the risk of re-separation remains. Families at risk of separating and/or institutionalizing children and those reintegrating most often require the very same supports and services, close to home and provided by the same qualified and competent social service workforce.

This Strengthening Families in India: Framework and Guidance aims to present a framework for understanding and defining components of family strengthening, which addresses the prevention and reintegration challenges and outlines guidance on key actions, approaches and tools. It is intended to support both government and non-government social service workers and the child protection workforce at all levels to roll out high quality and coordinated family strengthening services. These services:

- Move the child protection mechanisms charged with identifying families at-risk from a reactive to proactive or preventative response, which prevents child-family unnecessary separation and institutionalization before it occurs.
- Share a common framework for understanding and implementing family strengthening;
- Recognize community roles and the diversity of the Indian States, communities and families; and
- Include mapping and access to government schemes and resources, as well as non-government services aimed targeted to families.

³ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2019). Community Based Child Protection in Humanitarian Action: Definitions and Terminology. Accessed at: https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/terminology_and_definitions_reference_list_lowres.pdf

⁴ Page 2 of United Nations. (2010). Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. Resolution 64/142. Accessed at: <https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/Guidelines%20for%20the%20Alternative%20Care%20of%20Children%20-%20English.pdf>

⁵ INSAMER. (2020). Orphan Report. Accessed at: https://en.insamer.com/uploads/pdf/dosya_2928-1.pdf

⁶ Report of the Committee for Analysing Data of Mapping and Review Exercise of Child Care Institutions under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 and Other Homes: Volume 1 Main Report, Ministry of Women and Child Development - Government of India 01 Sep 2018, <https://iacn.in/resource/the-report-of-the-committee-for-analysing-data-of-mapping-and-review-exercise-of-ccis-under-jja-2015-and-other-homes/>

⁷ <https://www.nipccd.nic.in/file/reports/handbk18.pdf>, The State of the World's Children 2017: Children in a Digital World; United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), December 2017, pp 174-177

⁸ <https://www.nipccd.nic.in/file/reports/handbk18.pdf>, Census of India 2011, Table C-13, Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India, New Delhi

⁹ <https://missionvatsalya.wcd.gov.in/>

National Policy Related to Family Strengthening

- The **National Policy for Children** (2013) recognizes that children have the right to be raised in a family environment as the best environment for their growth and development.
- The **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act**, 2015 recognizes the process of rehabilitation and social integration of children through family-based care, restoring children to parents, adoption, foster care and makes provisions for sponsorship and financial assistance to families of children to meet the basic and essential needs of children.
- The **Mission Vatsalya** (2022), previously known as the Integrated Child Protection Scheme, targets children in difficult circumstances and recommends, amongst other things, equipping families to care for children and use of institutionalisation only as a last resort care option. States are urged to shift focus to family-based care.

Defining Family Strengthening

Evidence, practice, international conventions and national policy all recognize that children do best when they are in safe and nurturing families and that efforts should prioritize enabling families to stay together when it is in the best interest of the child. Within care reform, the scope of family strengthening has three primary functions:

1. To prevent family separation before it occurs in vulnerable families at risk;
2. To build resilience in families who have experienced separation as they reintegrate with children (as in prevent re-separation); and
3. To strengthen families who provide family-based alternative care. The constitution, laws and policies of India set forth many schemes to help ensure family strengthen and the family's access to services and resources ([see table 4-listing government schemes and services](#)).

The newest, government scheme, Mission Vatsalya, aims to improve the child protection and care system and promote *family-based care of children* in difficult circumstances. Mission Vatsalya brings together several of the previous child protection schemes and sets forth mechanisms for coordination of several government ministries and agencies with a role in child protection and healthy families.¹⁰

Family strengthening is based on a core understanding that children and families exist within connected ecosystems, and strength of any of these systems depends on the strength of the other. It recognizes how difficult being a strong

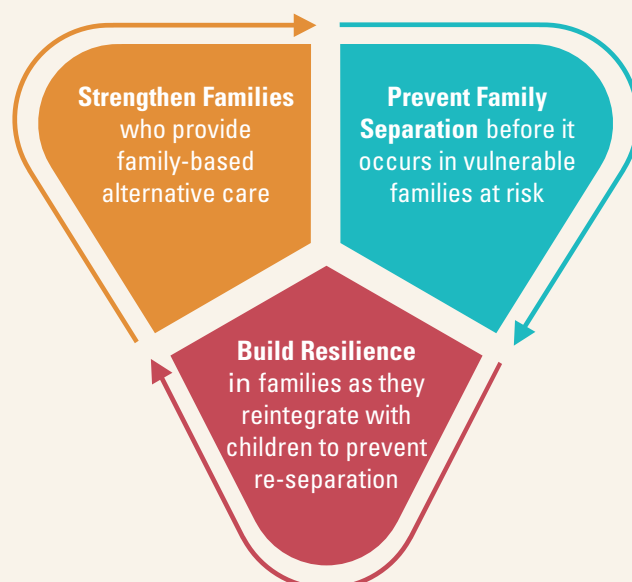


Figure 2: Family Strengthening Framework

family can be within a fragile community; not impossible, but difficult. One core and underlying principle of family strengthening is recognition that children and their families are part of these **different but connected ecosystems**, each integral to a healthy and safe environment where a child can develop to reach his or her potential.

The Center for Social Policy, an U.S. based policy analysis and development leader, suggests family strengthening “is a **process** to enhance the capacity of parents, caregivers and children, with the goal to build positive relationships within families and to enable access to social protection services;” critical to addressing the factors that lead to separation

¹⁰ <https://wcd.gov.in/offering/mission-vatsalya-mission-vatsalya-scheme>

and alternative care placement, particularly in CCI. They further describe it as “a **preventive measure** whereby vulnerable families, those facing poverty, social discrimination and any other form of distress, are supported to build protective factors.”¹¹ The IACN’s own work on the topic suggests these defining characteristics, “Family strengthening approaches have an objective to **ensure children live with strong families** by increasing awareness, knowledge and skills, linking families to services and opportunities around household economic strengthening and parenting, and building robust community structures for family support”¹². Lastly, effective family

strengthening programs that aim to keep children in nurturing and safe families, also **links the prevention of family separation and effective and sustainable reintegration of children** who have been separated.

The family strengthening approach is cross-cutting and targets families at risk of family separation, families facing imminent separation, often through involvement of government protection workers or other mandated bodies, and families who are already separated and are preparing for reunification or are in the process of reintegration.

DEFINITION: Family strengthening refers to programs, strategic approaches and deliberate processes of empowering families with the necessary capacities, opportunities, networks, relationships and access to services and resources to promote and build resilience, such that children are provided safe and nurturing care even when the family is under stress. These programs and processes depend on the active engagement of parents, caregivers, children, youth and other family members in decisions that affect the family’s life.



¹¹ Definition in text box adapted from: Center for Social Policy. (2004). Policy Brief No. 1: Introduction to Family Strengthening. National Human Services Assembly.

¹² India Alternative Care Network, Changing the Way We Care. (2022). Compendium on Family Strengthening and Alternative Care Programmes Practised Across India. Accessed at: <https://bettercarenetwork.org/library/strengthening-family-care/compendium-on-family-strengthening-and-alternative-care-programmes-practised-across-india> and India Alternative Care Network, UNICEF, Hope and Homes for Children. (2022). Every Child’s Right to Family Life: An Introduction to Family Strengthening and Alternative Care in India. Accessed at: <https://bettercarenetwork.org/library/strengthening-family-care/every-child’s-right-to-family-life-an-introduction-to-family-strengthening-and-alternative-care-in>

Core Principles of Family Strengthening

According with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which India is signatory, **family is the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children**, and should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community, recognizing that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding¹³. Further with grounding in child rights and Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, the **family strengthening approach** has the following core principles:

- **Principle of Participation:** Every child shall have a right to be heard and to participate in all processes and decisions affecting his interest and the child's views shall be taken into consideration with due regard to the age and maturity of the child. [S.3(iii), JJ Act, 2015]
- **Principle of Best Interest:** All decisions regarding the child shall be based on the primary consideration that they are in the best interest of the child and to help the child to develop full potential. [S.3(iv), JJ Act, 2015]
- **Principle of Family Responsibility:** The primary responsibility of care, nurture and protection of the child shall be that of the biological family or adoptive or foster parents, as the case may be. [S. 3(v), JJ Act, 2015]
- **Positive Measures:** All measures are to be mobilized including those of family and community, for promoting the well-being, facilitating development of identity and providing an inclusive and enabling environment, to reduce vulnerabilities of children and the need for intervention under this Act. [S. 3(vii), JJ Act, 2015]
- **Principle of Institutionalization as a Measure of Last Resort:** A child shall be placed in institutional care as a step of last resort after making a reasonable inquiry. [S.3(xii), JJ Act, 2015]
- **Every Family, Every Child, has Strengths,** and recognizing those enables us to build upon the existing capacities and promote resilience whilst still addressing the challenges that children and families face. Family strengthening recognizes the worth, dignity and strength of each child and family.
- **All Decisions and Actions are made on an Individual Basis.** The interests of children are different from adults, and therefore when adults make decisions that affect children, they must be **child-centered**, thinking carefully about how their decisions will impact children. Families should be at the centre of the strengthening processes and family members, including children, should be involved in decision-making.
- Any engagement with and support to children and families must **do no harm** or expose them to further risk, vulnerability or harm.
- **Respecting and Fairly Treating Children** and their families regardless of race, religion, ability, ethnicity/tribe, socioeconomic or health status is fundamental, and we **appreciate diversity**, understanding that children and families come in different shapes, sizes and configurations and that no two families are alike.
- **Participation of Children, Young People and Adult Family Members** in matters which concern them is not only their right but enables and empowers them to take an active role in decisions and actions that impact their own lives.

¹³ UN General Assembly. (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child. United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577. Accessed at: <https://bettercarenetwork.org/international-framework/international-standards-and-policies>

Risk and Protective Factors in Families



Family Strengthening approach addresses both risk and protective factors

Evidence suggests that a range of drivers, both push and pull factors, result in children separating from their families and ending up in alternative care,¹⁴ including institutions and other types of residential care. Some factors ‘push’ children into alternative care, for example, family economic situation or other forms of stress, or violence in the home. Some factors ‘pull’ children into alternative care, specifically residential care, for example, access to education or active recruitment from CCIs combined with families believing the care will be better for their children. Although poverty, abuse, and neglect are the main reasons for children’s entry into alternative care globally, most households experiencing poverty or abuse and neglect do not separate. Most often children and families face more than one barrier, propelling them into high risk of separation.

The family strengthening framework is built around an understanding of these combination of heightened risk factors, barriers and reduced protective factors that can make some families separate from their children. Risk factors are conditions or variables associated with a lower likelihood of positive outcomes and a higher likelihood of negative or socially undesirable outcomes.

Family strengthening recognizes the ecological framework in which children and families live; surrounded by and interacting with the wider community and larger society. Some community or societal factors can also put families at risk such as conflict or violence prone environments, communities without access to employment opportunities, or communities who are displaced or otherwise unsettled.

Addressing risk factors is usually not enough. Research also suggests that building up the family’s protective factors is critical (see later section on protective factors)¹⁵. There is no one type of family living precariously, just as there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Some families require more intensive services than others. Local context will also vary.

Table 1 summarizes the risk factors largely associated with family-child separation and challenging reintegration in the India context. It was validated by a series of interviews and workshops including with government officers and protection workers, community child protection volunteers, and representatives of non-governmental and civil society organizations.

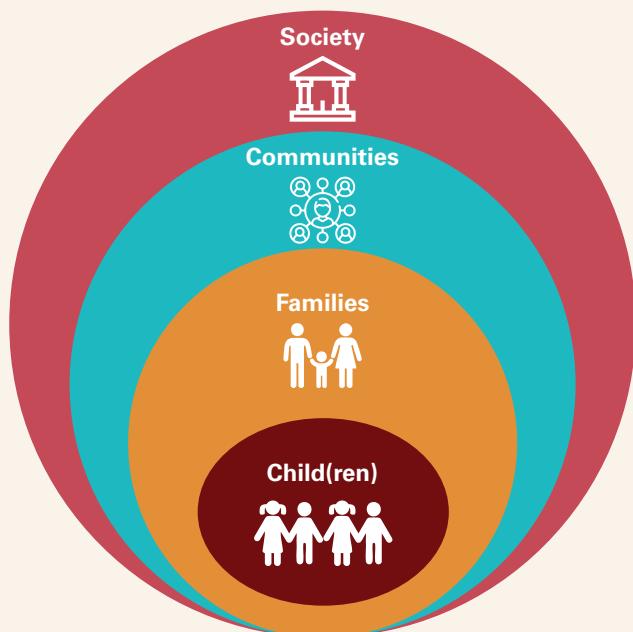


Figure 3: Ecological Framework

¹⁴ A formal or informal arrangement whereby a child is looked after at least overnight outside the parental home, either by decision of a judicial or administrative authority or duly accredited body, or at the initiative of the child, his/her parent(s) or primary caregivers, or spontaneously by a care provider in the absence of parents; includes family-based and residential forms of care.

¹⁵ World Health Organization definitions accessed at: https://www.who.int/hiv/pub/me/en/me_prev_ch4.pdf

Table 1: Risk Factors Associated with Family-Child Separation¹⁶

Family Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death of parent(s)/breadwinner • Single-parent household • Elderly caregiver • Migrant parent(s) • Families are not aware of the harms of separation (and for them it is just like sending children to hostels) • Large family size (more than three children) • Child marriage, adolescent pregnancy/parenthood • Disability of a child or other household member • Chronic illness, HIV/AIDS, mental illness • Parents in correctional facilities • Separated parents
Ability to Take Care of Basic Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty • Lack of access to (quality) education • Inadequate shelter/insecure housing, food insecurity • Lack of access to health, disability, or other services
Behavioral Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic, intimate partner, family violence • Abuse or neglect of children in household • Child labor • Children with challenging behavior • Substance use/abuse • High level of parental/caregiver stress • Low education attainment of parent/caregiver
Context Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of extended family or community support for child care, parent mentoring, advice • Absence of safety and security within the community (e.g. gang activity, unsafe play areas, poor school settings) • Community engagement in harmful forms of work and/or lack of employment opportunities • Cultural or harmful traditional practices such as genital mutilation and child marriage • Violent conflict • Climate change, pandemic & natural disasters

¹⁶ Laumann, L. & Namey, E. (2019). Meeting the Costs of Family Care: Household Economic Strengthening to Prevent Children's Separation and Support Reintegration. Resource Guide. FHI360. Retrieved from <https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/ASPIRES-FamilyCare-v4.pdf> , page 17.

On the other hand, **protective factors** enhance the likelihood of positive outcomes, increase resiliency and lessen the likelihood of negative consequences when a family is exposed to risks or shocks. Some of the core factors are illustrated in the figure 4 - Protective Factors,¹⁷ and include the factors associated both with family-child separation and those that promote caregiver and child resilience (see also Annex 1). Protective factors recognize the complexity within families and the fact that separation and institutionalization is most often multi-faceted.

- **Caregiver resilience:** An ability to manage stress and function well when faced with challenges, adversity and trauma.
- **Social and emotional competence of children:** Family and child interactions help children develop the ability to communicate clearly, recognize and regulate their emotions, and establish and maintain relationships.
- **Social support and connections:** Positive relationships that provide emotional, informational, instructional and spiritual support.
- **Responsive caregiving:** Understanding child development and an ability to use parenting strategies that support physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional

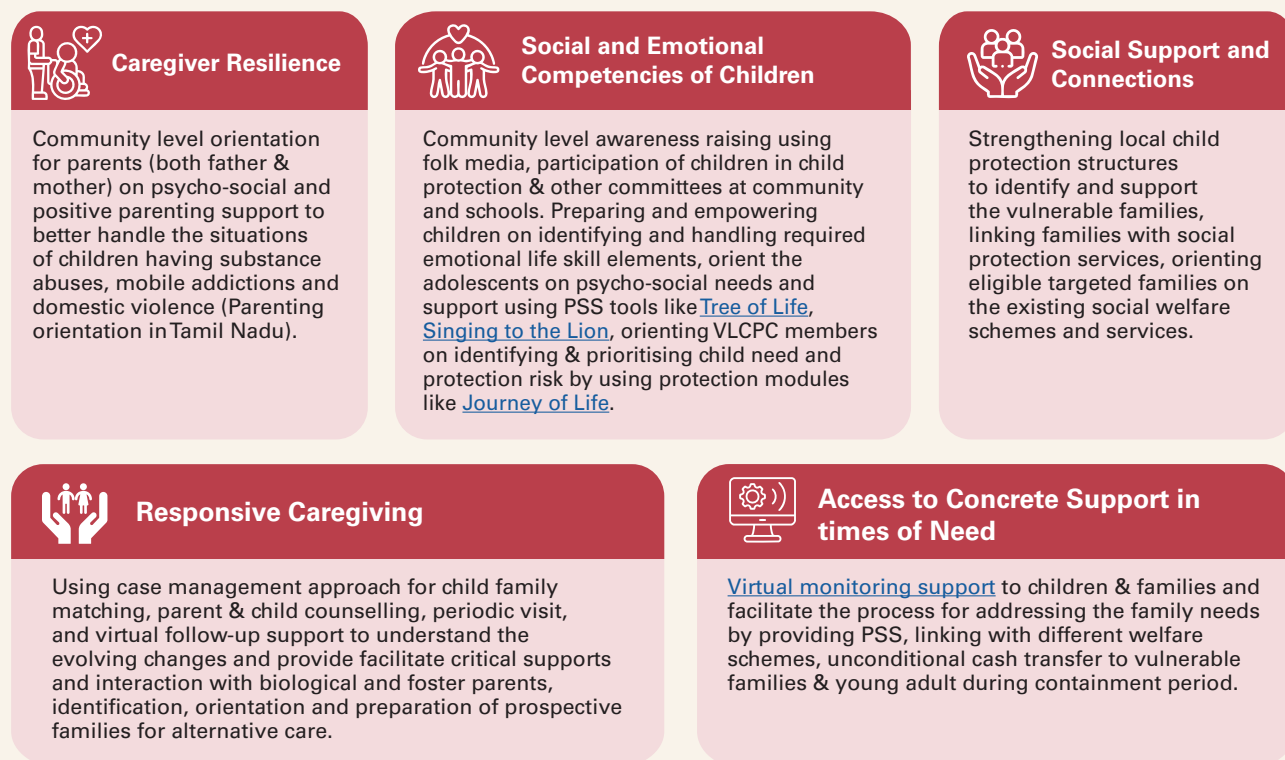
development. This protective factor includes attachment between caregiver and child – child and caregiver, and the nurturing that results from bonding.

- **Access to concrete support in times of need:** Access to concrete support and services that address a family's needs (risk factors) and help minimize stress caused by challenges and adversity.



Figure 4: Protective Factors

Contextualized Examples of Interventions to Enhance Protective Factors:

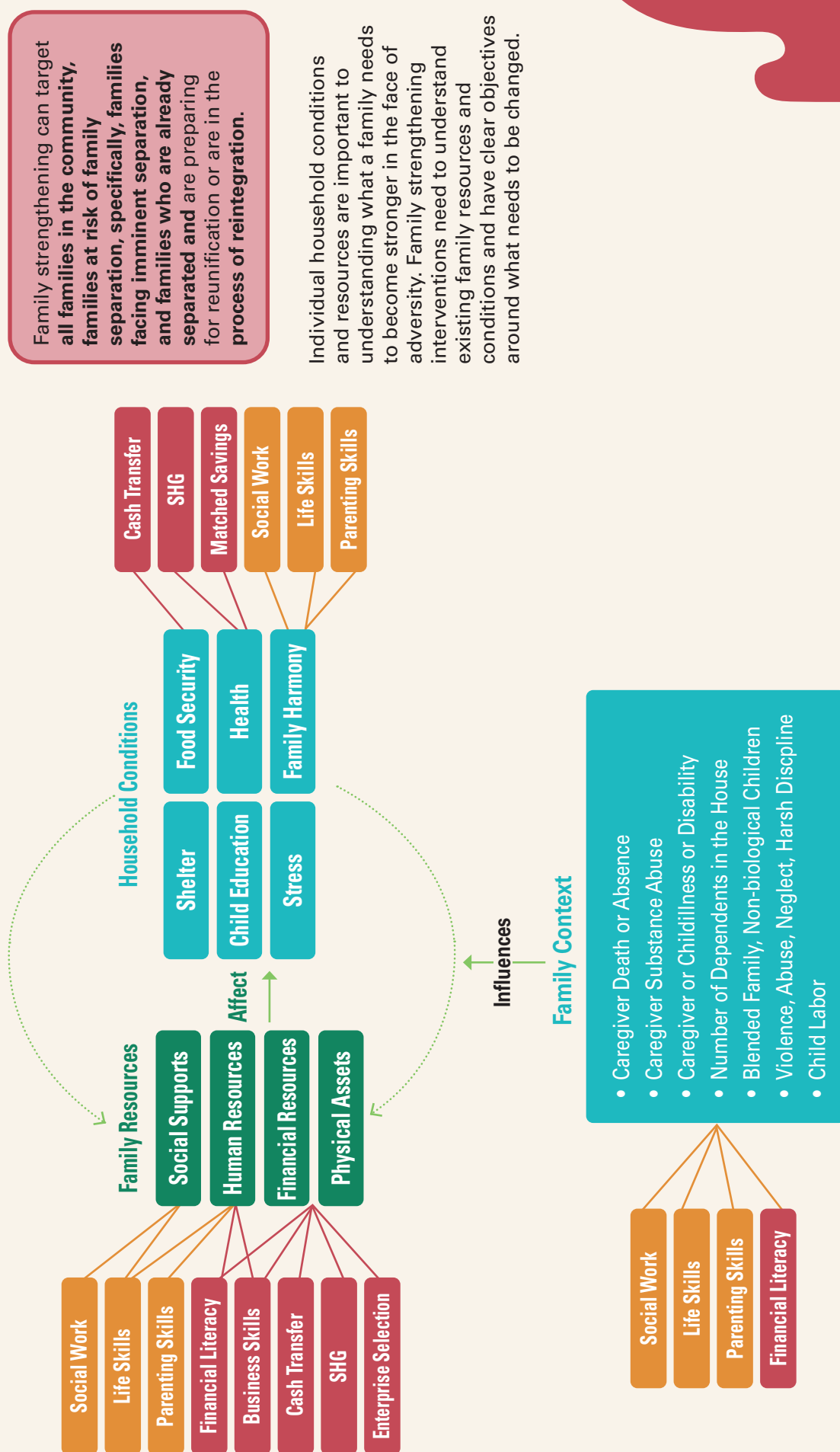


¹⁷ Adapted from the Center for Study of Social Policy. About Strengthening Families and The Protective Factors Framework. Accessed at: <https://cssp.org/resource/core-meanings-of-the-strengthening-families-protective-factors/>



Primary, Secondary & Tertiary Family Strengthening

Chart 1: International example showing drivers of family-child separation with illustrative family social (blue) and economic (green) strengthening interventions¹⁸



¹⁸ Laumann, L. & Namey, E. (2019). Op cit.

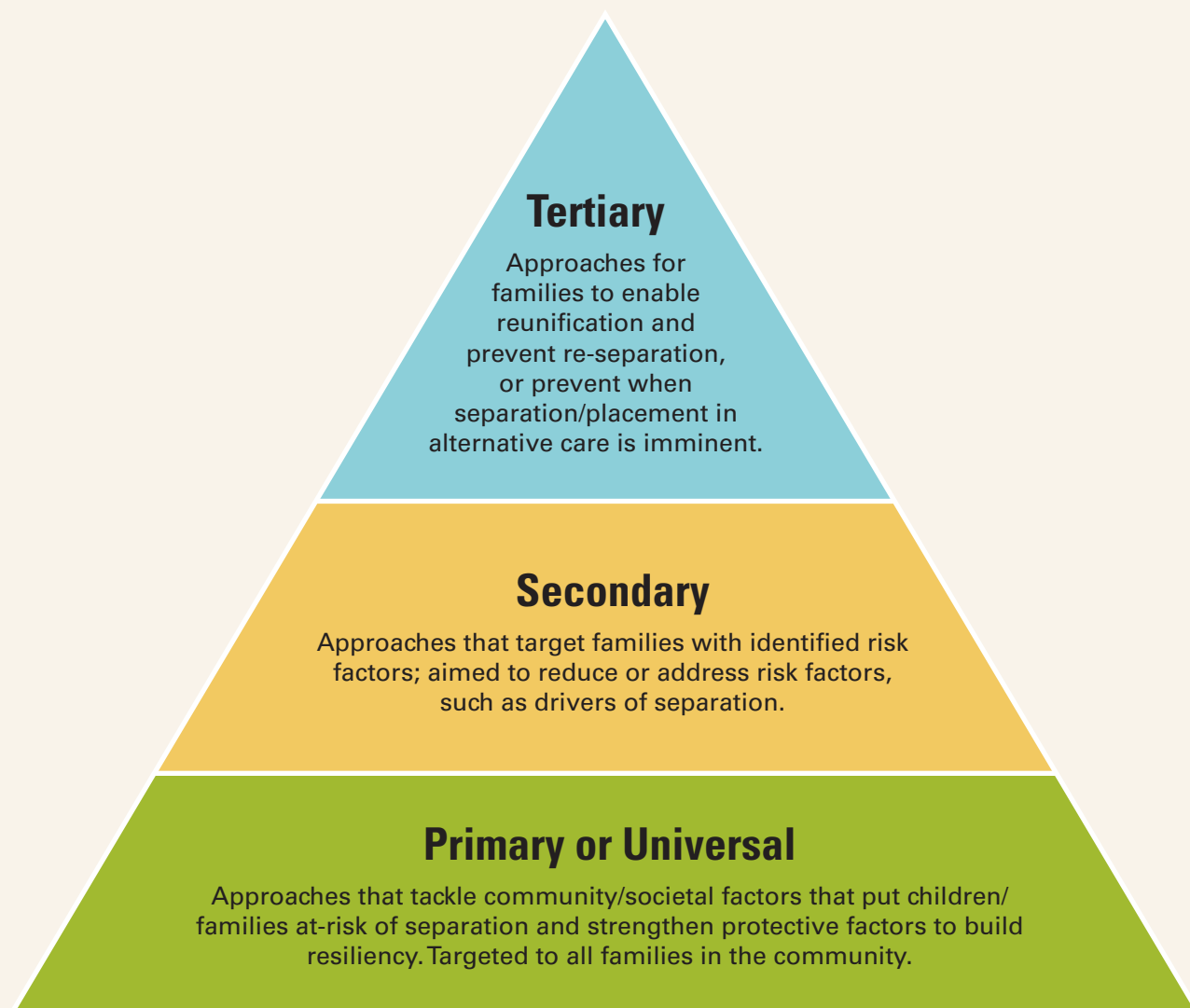
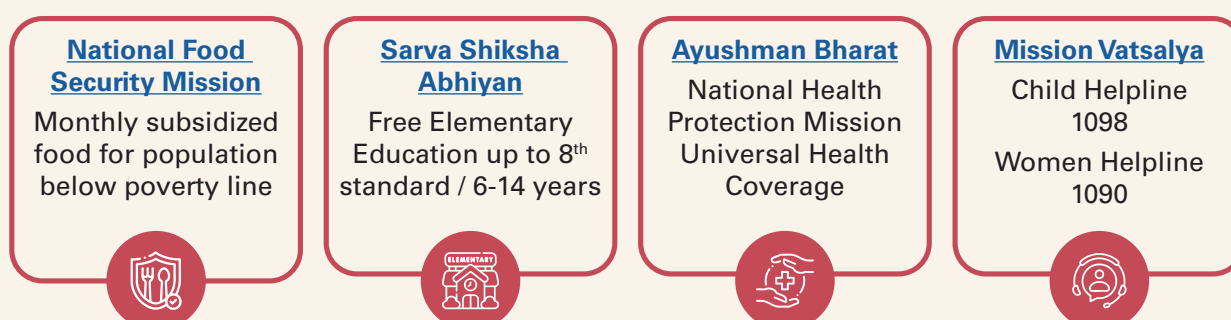


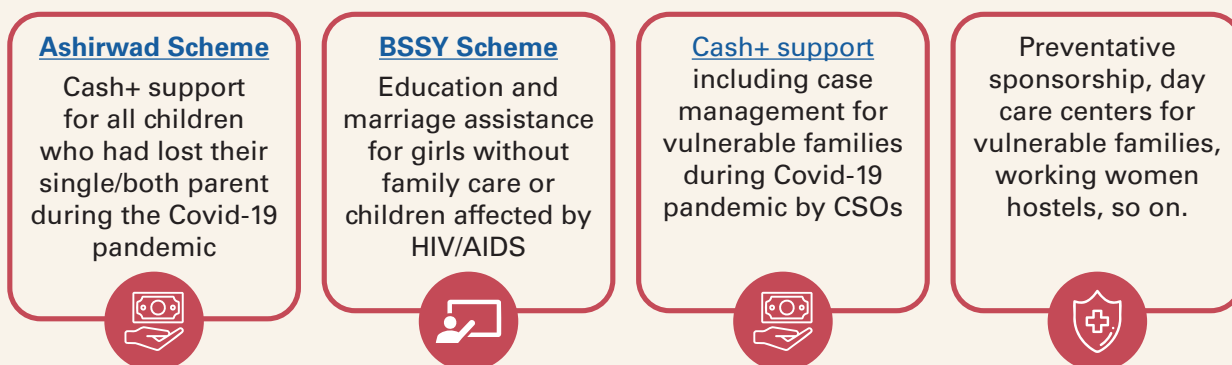
Figure 5: Primary, Secondary & Tertiary Family Strengthening

Family Strengthening can be tiered by primary or universal, secondary and tertiary family strengthening as shown in the pyramid above. Each of these are described in detail below.

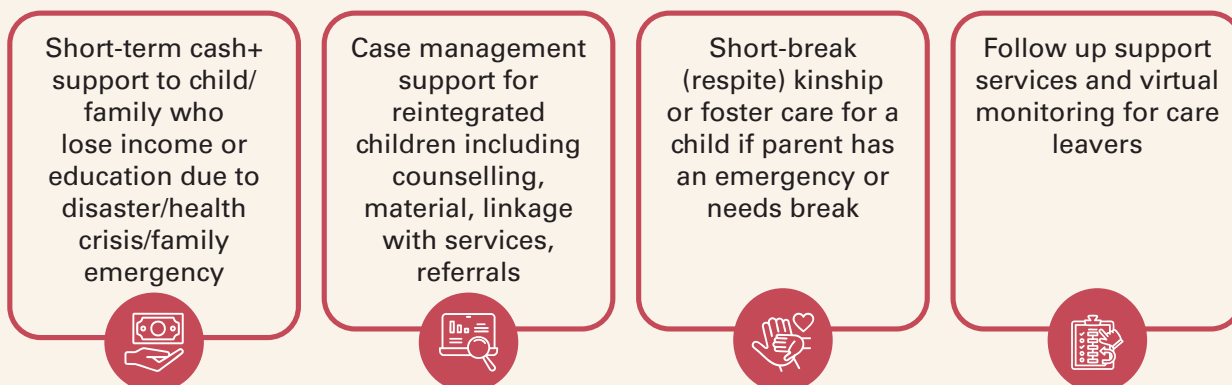
- **Primary or universal** means policies and interventions with general application for all community members to address societal factors that can lead to separation (e.g. strategies to combat poverty, discrimination and stigmatization, change attitudes towards disability and single parenthood, reduce family dysfunction and isolation, and to adopt social policies promoting family empowerment and parenting skills). These can be understood as broad-based approaches, programs or services targeting a rather large group of people who are at risk. For example government supported flagship programs like:



- **Secondary** refers to those services and/or supports to families where there is a specific risk (examples – school drop-out, stress of parenting/caregiving, acquired stress/anxiety due to unexpected change in family/community structure and/or function like – loss of family member or friend, violence or conflict in family/community, challenging behavior due to disability, evolving change in gender identity, etc.) for separation. This could be, for example, linking children or families to social networks and to reduce isolation within the community, individualized counselling, parenting education and in some instances, case management. Preventive and family strengthening services and supports from government and private actors in a given context and vulnerabilities could include:



- **Tertiary** family strengthening are approaches where separation is likely imminent. For example, a gatekeeping mechanism (i.e. Child Welfare Committee, Juvenile justice Board) has determined the child should be separated or where a child and family are being reunified after having been separated. Efforts at this stage focus on securing conditions that enable a positive re-start, a successful reunification and reintegration, and prevent a return to alternative care. This is typically coupled with case management. For example, critical family strengthening support at child/family level to prevent separation and re-institutionalization, and other potential risks could include:



Entry Points for Families

Family strengthening services reach families through one or more of the following routes:

- Through the Village Level Child Protection Committees (VLCPC), and Panchayat Level Child Protection Committee (PLCPC) who already support identification of children and families at-risk of breakdown, including separation, Child Welfare Committee (CWC) who act as gatekeepers to prevent children from being sent into CCLs or reunify institutionalized children with family or relative.
- Three-tier Panchayat Raj Institutions (3-tier PRIs) at Gram Panchayat, Block and District support families with social welfare and protection services, increase awareness and set up mechanism to challenge negative social norms and practices, and facilitate linkages and referrals. Especially the Gram Panchayat has an important function to identify, plan and intervene to ensure the critical needs of vulnerable children and families are met and communities become child friendly as a part of Gram Panchayat Development Plan process and utilization of minimum 5% untied fund for child welfare and protection.

- C. Through District Child Protection Units (DCPU) and their District Action Plans, which will include raising awareness on positive parenting within their target communities, preventing family and child separation, reintegration of children from CCLs, and building strong systems of family-based alternative care. DCPUs have responsibility for children identified as high risk by the VCPs and for any alternative care placements. They may directly recommend family strengthening services for cases brought to their attention.
 - D. Children currently in CCLs who are going to reunify with their family of origin, extended family or into family-based alternative care. Family strengthening will be built into the case plan with goals to strengthen the family's protective factors and address risks before and during the reunification and as the child and family reintegrate.
 - E. Families identified by and enrolled into family strengthening activities by non-governmental organizations. A strong functioning referral system helps government and non-government to coordinate bi-directional referrals for the various interventions, supports and services needed by families coming to their attention.
 - F. Families may identify themselves, particularly for primary prevention or family strengthening activities targeted to a primary audience ([Refer to Figure 6](#)). Through community awareness campaigns, behavior change approaches, advertising and public health announcements the general population of families can be made aware of services and other offerings that any family can benefit from. They may then self-enroll.
- Family might be referred to family strengthening services available in different government departments:**
- I. **Women and Child Development/concerned department deals with child protection:** Sponsorship support for prevention and rehabilitation, Juvenile Justice Funds for education and basic needs for children, Family based alternative care – foster care and kinship care, aftercare supports, CWC' referrals for specific services, case management, others.
 - II. **Education Department:** Provides free education up to standard 8th including uniform, books and study materials, mid-day meal for all and other benefits such as scholarship, cycle, umbrella & laptop, etc. (support for the girls and/or boys in different states), study loan and other benefits for higher education.
 - III. **Health:** Primary health care is free including institutional delivery, immunization, vaccination, subsidized generic medicine, family health insurance (5-10 lakhs) annually, mental health program, so on.
 - IV. **Disability:** Disability certificate, scholarship, pension, therapeutic services, vocational support, assistive devices, and special education, counselling, so on.
 - V. **Nutrition:** Free supplementary food and nutrition for all children up to 6 years, nutrition supplement for pregnant women, adolescent girls, so on.
 - VI. **Housing:** Both Rural and Urban housing schemes to provide financial assistance for construction of pucca house for the families below poverty line.
 - VII. **Food Grain:** Subsidized food grains (Rice, Wheat, Pulses) under Public Distribution System for people below poverty line.
 - VIII. **Skill and Income:** Free skill building program for young adults, rural and urban employment guarantee program for unskilled labor; financial and material assistance for unorganized labor; unconditional cash transfer/assistance for women (state specific); Low interest-rate loans, capacity building, federation and business development support for Self-Help Groups.
 - IX. **Socio-Legal Service:** Free legal services for vulnerable children and adults specially marginalized groups like schedule tribe, schedule caste; victim compensations for child/bonded labor, POCSO victims, so on.
 - X. **Social Protection:** Pension schemes for elderly, disabled, widow, and people living with HIV, so on.
 - XI. **Emergency Response:** Rescue, Relief - Cash+ support, restoration services for natural/ man-made disasters.

Determining which tier a family is in

While all families can benefit from support and strengthening from time-to-time, some need more direct mentoring, intervention and services. This can mean helping families in the secondary category with referrals to services that target their particular risks, such as to a referral to mental health services, and one-time follow ups to ensure the service was accessed. For families in the tertiary category, case management inclusive of an in-depth assessment and individual case plan, is required and coupled with the family strengthening approaches.

Job aids help VLCPC/PLCPC and others identify families with particular risks and the most vulnerable families can be helpful to determine

families who fall into the secondary and tertiary categories and may need to be specifically targeted with services, referrals or other interventions, including case management ([see example tools in Annex 3](#)). Risk identification tools, completed with children and families' participation, help to give a more in-depth view of both risks and existent family strengths, while prioritization criteria¹⁹ can also help to determine if a family gets assessed for and enrolled in secondary or tertiary services/interventions. Proper criteria are based on the principles discussed earlier and should be applied consistently. Formal assessments are not needed for universal or secondary approaches, which typically are more broad reaching to a community or particular at-risk group.

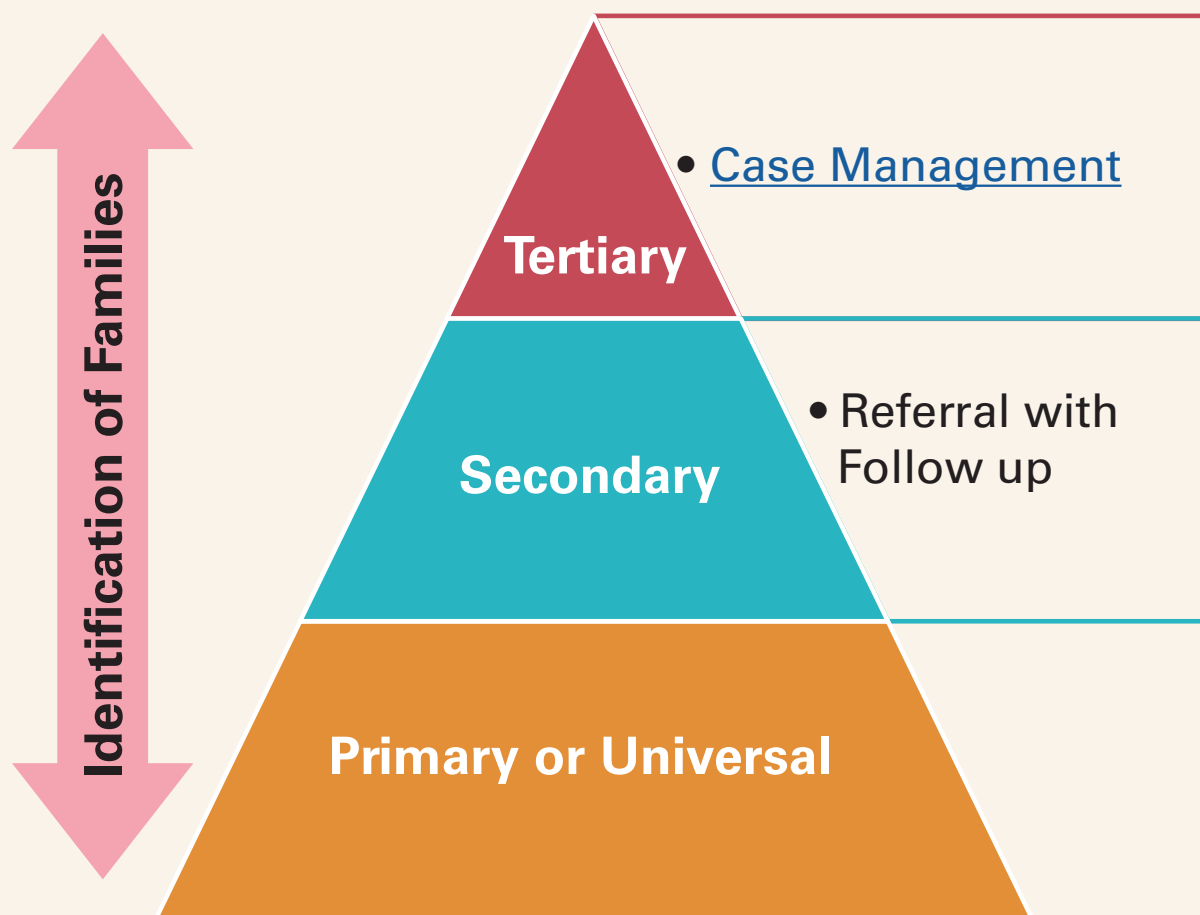


Figure 6: Primary, Secondary & Tertiary Family Strengthening

¹⁹ Vulnerability mapping tool to determine who gets into case management. The link to the tool - <https://iacn.in/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Guidebook-PLCPP-ARUNA.pdf>

Chart 2: Illustration of Movement from Identification to Case Management for Tertiary Level

Identification

Of children known to be reunified, referred from community, or self-identifying

Actions might include:

1. Referral for immediate service e.g., health, protection, legal
2. Providing information or one-off counselling
3. Planning for full assessment

NB: This is before any full assessment or case plan. Work with the family might end here if all they needed were referrals & information.

Assessment

Of children and families found to be at high or imminent risk during identification

Action might include:

1. Referral for immediate service
2. Completing a full assessment of the family's risk and protective factors
3. Speaking to other people involved in services or supports to the family
4. Setting a next visit with the family
5. Determining if family needs case management

No more than 2 weeks after referral

Case Planning

With families determined to need case management alongside of services and referrals

Action might include:

1. Visit with the family to determine area of risk and protective factors to focus on
2. Family group conference
3. Setting goals and actions
4. Setting a schedule of monitoring and follow up
5. Counselling and information
6. Referrals to services and supports

Every 2 weeks for first month, then at least monthly

Monitoring

Of Family enrolled in case management - regular meetings and visit

Actions might include:

1. Checking progress on goals and actions
2. Adding new goals or actions
3. Counselling, information and mentoring
4. Referrals to services and support
5. Case review against goals and benchmarks

NB: Case review can lead to agreement to close the case if goals have been met

Case dependent

Case Closure

Based on completion of goals and achievement of benchmarks - or if a family declines, move (transfer) or circumstances prevent further action

Actions might include:

1. Reviewing case plan and agreeing on achievement against goals and benchmarks
2. Discussing case closure and future support needs
3. Completing case closure forms and ensuring all documentation complete



Family Strengthening Services

There is no one size fits all and the services will depend on not only what is inside the household, but what is available around the family – social supports are as important in addressing the context as external interventions or services. The package of support appropriate for each family will depend on their unique set of risks and protective factors in order to ensure that the family has strengths across all areas of protective factors (parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need, and social and emotional competence of children). Some examples of the kinds of services included in family strengthening are shown in table 2.

Table 2: Example Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Family Strengthening Supports, Interventions, Services

Primary/Universal Family Strengthening	Secondary Family Strengthening	Tertiary Family Strengthening
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring access to basic health, education and social protection services Ensuring access to specialized services such as health, disability, legal, family violence, substance abuse treatment General community positive parenting education / parenting skills training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conditional cash transfers linked to other supports Referral to services, conditional cash transfers 	<p>Case Management to Support: Accompanied referral to services – basic and specialized</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community savings & loans groups & financial management skills in community groups Community sensitization and awareness raising on family care – community participation in community building events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted positive parenting education within community groups Targeted savings & loan groups & financial skills training Counselling / psychosocial support Community & faith-based support groups Youth-focused support groups Targeted ECD & early disability identification/interventions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted positive parenting education within community groups and home-based Targeted household economic strengthening: Cash transfers / material support Income generation & livelihoods activities Financial literacy training Intensive one-to-one counselling and psychosocial support

It is likely that for most households some form of economic strengthening is important. For some, this will mean a 'cash plus care' or 'cash plus' interventions. Cash plus' interventions combine cash transfers (conditional or unconditional²⁰), with one or more types of complementary support, which may be

- Components that are provided as integral elements of the cash transfer intervention, such as through the provision of additional benefits or in-kind transfers, social and behavior change communication, or psychosocial support, and
- Components that are external to the intervention but offer explicit linkages into services provided by other sectors, such as through direct provision of access to services, or facilitating linkages to services.²¹ Evidence from a number of countries shows the benefits of integrating cash and other forms of social support.²²

²⁰ "Conditional cash transfers may allow recipients freedom of choice in spending decisions, but are contingent upon specific behaviors, such as use of health, nutrition, or education services or on use of funds for a particular purpose. Unconditional cash transfers allow recipients to set their own spending priorities for the money received." Laumann, L. & Namey, E. (2019). Op cit., p54

²¹ Roelen, K., Devereux, S., Abdulai, A. G., Martorano, B., Palermo, T., Ragno, L. P. (2017). How to Make 'Cash Plus' Work: Linking Cash Transfers to Services and Sectors. Office of Research – Innocenti Working Paper. WP-2017-10

²² In South Africa, combining cash grants with parenting support reduced HIV risky behavior by 50 percent for both boys and girls. Cluver, L. (2018). Reducing HIV in Africa with 'cash plus care.' ESRC blog, UK Research and Innovation. Chile Solidario has combined cash transfers with psychosocial support and preferential access to social services, and has been shown to substantially increase access to health, education and social welfare programs Roelen, R., Devereux, S., Abdulai, A & Martorano, B et. al. (2017). How to Make 'Cash Plus' Work: Linking Cash Transfers to Services and Sectors, Innocenti Working Paper 2017- 10, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence.

'Cash plus' interventions are part of, but not the complete package of support. Cash transfers are often useful in the following circumstances: part of stabilization of a family prior to separation or during reintegration, for example by preventing families from selling off resources that they need for income generation or enabling families to purchase one-off needs such as giving cash rather than 'reunification kits'; social security grants for those who cannot work, for example, old-age pensions or disability grants, or as compensation for caring responsibilities, such as child support, parental/adoption leave or foster care grants; to encourage a particular behavior, such as when a conditional cash grant is related to birth registration or ECD attendance, for example. Social protection support in any form other than that to people who are not able to be actively productive is ideally seen as an interim step as a way of stabilizing while it engages in activities to sustainably produce income.²³ Cash is important, especially as part of a national social protection strategy, but is unlikely to be necessary for all families. 'Cash plus' is an important way of providing integrated support to families, and it is important to decide what the best components of the 'plus' for the local context and families.²⁴

Providers of Family Strengthening Services

It is important to conduct a mapping of each community to understand which services are available to strengthen children and families. The services should include formal services (such as access to health, education, psychosocial support provided by a local community-based organization, for example) and informal support (such as faith groups, sports clubs, informal credit groups, for example).

Both government agencies and non-government organizations provide family strengthening supports and services. These may vary from state-to-state, district-to-district, or local community-to-local community. Collectively, government, non-government and community can empower families and promote positive outcomes for children. Not every intervention is necessary for every family, because each family faces unique challenges and, therefore, family strengthening approaches should include a range of interventions that aim to mitigate or reduce the risk of family separation and strengthen protective factors of children and families. They may be provided by a variety of workforce, such as village volunteers, DCPU officers or case workers/case managers, or through referral to other service providers. Interventions can be delivered at the household level on an individual or family basis or within the community through community groups or at community centers. Some interventions are designed as activities for children, some for parents or caregivers, and some for both together. Examples of supports and services are detailed in the following table 3.

Type	Provider	Roles/Responsibilities	Tier	Action/Services
Government	Panchayat level Child Welfare and Protection Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maps vulnerable families²⁵ 	Primary Secondary Tertiary	Identification of the vulnerable child/family
	Gram Panchayat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitates linkage with different social protection programs Provides for child protection priorities under Gram Panchayat Development Program (GPDP) Provides short term non/financial assistance to eligible families 	Secondary Tertiary	Provide direct cash/ kind support to most vulnerable families Facilitate referrals
	Block Level CP Committee and Officials ²⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures basic social welfare and protection services (housing, education supports, pension, nutrition, employment and income, etc.) are received 	Secondary Tertiary	Ensure that vulnerable child/families get government services they are eligible for

²³ Laumann, L. & Namey, E. (2019). Op cit., p55

²⁴ Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (November 2020). Social Protection & Child Protection: Working together to protect children from the impact of COVID-19 and beyond.; also in Spanish.

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Made up of Block Development Officer, Child Development Project Officer, Block Education Officer, Block Social Welfare Officer, Gram Panchayat Extension Officer, Others.

Type	Provider	Roles/Responsibilities	Tier	Action/Services
	District Level CP Committee, DCPU, CWC and other officials of relevant line departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make decisions about alternative care placement in the interest of the child Makes decisions about sponsorship support to families Provide rescue /rehabilitation/ reintegration services Provide linkage to education, livelihood, nutrition, health, legal aid, pensions, outreach support services, etc. Monitor families in sponsorship, foster care and children who leave care. 	Tertiary	Manages family-based alternative care services Provides sponsorship Manages programs for social reintegration of youth
Non-government	Community Based Organisations/NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maps and identifies target families²⁷ Assess families and enroll in services Provide referrals to other services and resources Implement family strengthening like economic support, parenting classes, family counselling, etc. Facilitate linkages with schemes 	Primary Secondary Tertiary	Identification of vulnerable families Family and community strengthening services Direct support to families

India has many different national and state level schemes that can be accessed by families, many of them targeted to general populations in the primary and secondary levels.

Table 3 shows the various government²⁸ social protection schemes (national) and what families they are targeted to. This should be complemented by state specific schemes that may also be available.

Table 4: Indicative list of government schemes²⁹

Umbrella Scheme	Tier	Sub-Schemes	Action/Services
Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0³⁰	Primary Secondary Tertiary	1. Umbrella ICDS- Anganwadi Services 2. Poshan Abhiyan Scheme for Adolescent Girls 3. National Creche Scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anganwadi Services for ground-level outreach and connection Collection of baseline data regarding children in need of care and protection Provides day care facilities to children of working mothers Back to school support for out of school adolescent girls
Mission Vatsalya³¹	Secondary Tertiary	1. Child Protection Services and Child Welfare Services 2. Mission Vatsalya Guidelines & Convergence Strategy 3. Sponsorship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes <i>family-based for care of children</i> in difficult circumstances Provides for the Child Helpline Outlines economic strengthening supports through “preventative” sponsorship Outlines parameters and resourcing of foster care and adoption Outlines roles and responsibilities of the DCPU duty holders

²⁷ Vulnerability mapping tool - <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/10Li1Z1jkS6l0ERLTV0p933o660bWnJE/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=114775041082835251952&rtopof=true&e&sd=true>

²⁸ Existing government link for all the programs myScheme.

²⁹ Ministry of Women and Child Development, Annual Report 2021-22.

³⁰ <https://wcd.gov.in/offering/nutrition-mission-saksham-anganwadi-and-poshan-2-0-mission-saksham-anganwadi-poshan-2-0>

³¹ <https://missionvatsalya.wcd.gov.in/>

Umbrella Scheme	Tier	Sub-Schemes	Action/Services
Mission Shakti (Mission for Protection and Empowerment of Women)	Secondary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SAMBAL 2. SAMARTHYA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shakti Sadan • Sakhi Niwas • Creche • PMMVY 3. Gender Budgeting, Research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One Stop Centers, Mahila Police Volunteers Women's Helpline, BBBP, Nari Adalat • Integrated relief and rehabilitation homes for women victims of trafficking and destitute women • Safe housing working women in urban centers
State Schemes³²: Palanhar³³ Bal Sangopan Yojana³⁴ Parvarish³⁵ Palak Mita Pita³⁶	Tertiary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Palanhar is State government scheme in the state of Rajasthan in India for children and families who are in and received children in foster care. 2. Bal Sangopan Yojana is the state government scheme of Maharashtra state in India providing family care support for parentless and other vulnerable children. 3. Parvarish is a state government of the state of Bihar in India providing for families and organizations providing or received children in foster care. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Palanhar scheme of Rajasthan provides for the education, food, clothes, shelter and other needs for vulnerable children in the state who come under the category of child in need of care and protection. The necessary facilities are made available for the children and the families by the state in a family environment. • Bal Sangopan Yojana is by the Maharashtra government for the children who are not taken care by their parents and caregivers due to reasons like disorder (chronic illness), death, separation, or abandonment by one parent or some other calamity and are also provided with temporary second family under this scheme. • Parvarish is a foster care scheme framed by the Bihar government to provide grants to families and organizations taking care of orphans, deprived and some group of disabled children. • Palak Mata Pita is a foster care Scheme introduced by government of Gujarat to promote foster care program. Under the scheme, foster families are provided financial assistance to foster a child.
Social Security Welfare Schemes³⁷	Primary Secondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PDS • Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana – Gramin (PMAY-G) • Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 35 kg of rice or wheat every month, while a household above the poverty line is entitled to 15 kg of food grain on a monthly basis. • Assistance provided to the Beneficiary to the tune of 1.2 Lakhs in plain areas and 1.3 Lakhs in Hilly Areas. • Health coverage of Rs. 5 lakhs per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization free of cost.

India also has many non-governmental and civil society organizations providing a range of services for children and families. [The Compendium on Family Strengthening and Alternative Care Programmes Practised Across India](#) is an excellent resource in this regard. Faith-based organizations play an important role in strengthening families and communities. In addition, to providing residential care and schooling, these organizations often provide counselling, financial and other material assistance, support for disabled people and their families, and a variety of community education and community strengthening activities that benefit families. The following table features some of the family strengthening services available.

³² <https://eshram.gov.in/social-security-welfare-schemes>

³³ <https://www.myscheme.gov.in/schemes/ps>

³⁴ <https://iacn.in/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Guidelines-for-Family-Foster-Care-Maharashtra.pdf>

³⁵ <https://iacn.in/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Amendments-to-Parvarish-Scheme-Bihar.pdf>

³⁶ <https://www.myscheme.gov.in/schemes/pmpy>

³⁷ <https://eshram.gov.in/social-security-welfare-schemes>

Table 5: Examples of Non-Government Family Strengthening Supports and Services

Family Strengthening Intervention	Where and how it is delivered	Tier	Example
Positive Parenting Skills Training	Group sessions at a center or in the community or home visits	Primary Secondary Tertiary	Parents attend programs and workshops on good health practices, child development, positive parenting and the importance of education etc.
Financial Education	Group sessions at a center or in the community or home visits	Primary Secondary Tertiary	Identified families are connected to livelihoods, provided technical and business skills training, linked to markets and support services and formal employment.
Savings and Internal Lending Communities or Other Models of Group Economic Empowerment	Group sessions and ongoing self-managed groups	Secondary Tertiary	Women in target community form a group and each week put small savings into a shared kitty. Once savings goal has been reached members can borrow against the group savings. A group facilitator helps to incorporate financial education.
Sponsorship or Small Grants for Income Generating Activities	One off non-government schemes for increasing household economics through skills training and small business start up	Secondary Tertiary	Organization provides small loans and assistance in preparing business plans and build business support networks amongst those receiving the loans.
Material Assistance such as Food Packages, Cash Transfers, Education Bursaries, etc.	One off or ongoing private, non-government schemes of economic or other material support	Secondary Tertiary	The family is provided with some sponsorship support annually. The staff encourages and assists in linking the children in the family to formal and non-formal educational opportunities. Quarterly home visits are made to the family.
Referral to Government Scheme or Other Services	Supported or unsupported linkage to a government scheme or other service family is both in need of and eligible for	Secondary Tertiary	The children identified are linked to the Parwarish scheme. The process involves identifying, filling, submitting and tracking the application.

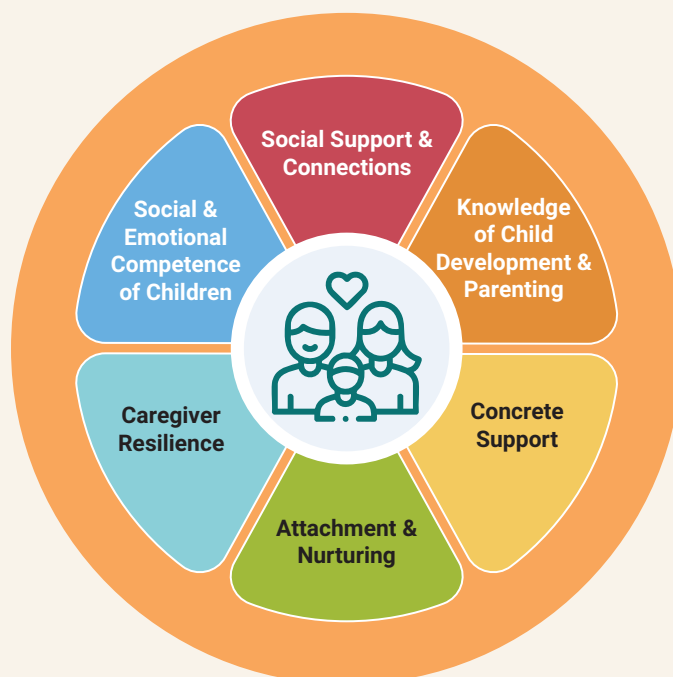
Family Strengthening Intervention	Where and how it is delivered	Tier	Example
Life Skills Training	For caregivers, care leavers or children and adolescents to strengthen their ability to living independently	Secondary Tertiary	Life skill sessions for 9-12 year olds and 13-18 year olds, twice every month covering topics such as decision- making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, building self- awareness, empathy, coping with stress, personal safety, and awareness sessions on numerous issues.
Counselling and Mentoring	One to one or small groups of people with similar issues, provided at home or at a clinic or center	Secondary Tertiary	Staff conducts group counselling for mothers and refers them to individual counselling when needed for a particular issue.
Case Management	Process for ensuring that family and child goals are reached and risks for separation are reduced. Builds on the strengths. One-to-one by a professional.	Tertiary	A family with a child reintegrating from a CCI develops a strengthening plan with the case worker and outlines goals. The case worker helps family access services and provides regular monitoring visits that include counselling and information.
Community Forums	For all families in a community, particularly a vulnerable community with identified community risk characteristics	Primary	Work with community members to develop a safety net for children and adolescents, prevent children from falling into risky situations. A forum for discussing community issues relevant for families with children and opportunity for families to get together and support each other.
Children's Enrichment	For all families in a community, particularly a vulnerable community with identified community risk characteristics. Based in a program or community center.	Primary Secondary	Safe spaces in rural areas where children and adolescents gather during after school times and can learn and interact freely with their peers.

Annexures



Annexure 1

What protective factors look like and how we can support families to build up and make the most of protective factors³⁸



Protective Factors

Protective factor	What it is	What it looks like	How this can be supported through programs
Caregiver resilience	<p>Managing stress and functioning well when faced with challenges, adversity and trauma</p> <p>Resilience is “strength in the face of adversity”</p>	<p>Resilience to general life stress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hope, optimism, self confidence • Problem solving skills • Self-care and willingness to ask for help • Ability to manage negative emotions <p>Resilience to parenting stress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not allowing stress to interfere with providing nurturing care • Positive attitude about parenting and child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show caregivers they are valued, through using positive words and building on what caregivers know. • Respect each family’s culture and circumstances, for example by • listening during home visits and providing positive feedback • Provide practical guidance and encourage parents to manage stress effectively, through parenting and financial literacy • Support parents and caregivers as decision-makers and help build decision-making and leadership skills • Support parents and caregivers to shield their child during stressful • times, for example by parenting tips for talking about difficult things in age-appropriate ways and through family budgeting

³⁸ Ibid

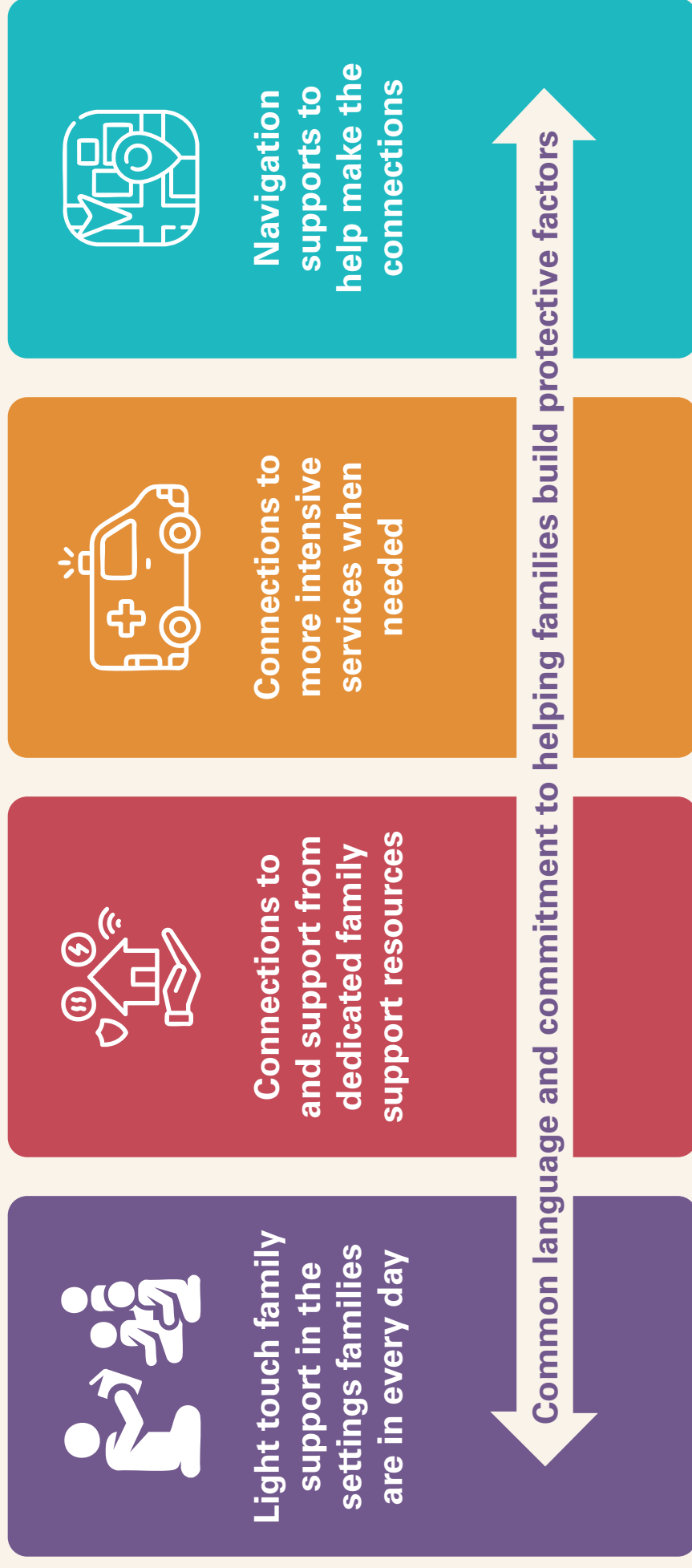
Protective factor	What it is	What it looks like	How this can be supported through programs
Social and emotional competence of children	Family-child interactions that help children communicate clearly, recognize and regulate their emotions and build and maintain relationships	<p>For the parent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm and consistent responses that foster a strong and secure attachment with the child • Encouraging and reinforcing social skills, setting limits and clear expectations <p>For the child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age-appropriate self-regulation • Ability to form and maintain relationships with others • Positive interactions with others • Effective communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help parents encourage their child's social and emotional development through positive parenting techniques, such as stimulation, learning through play, non-violent discipline • Encourage caregiver and child communication through all group activities and home visits • Link children to life skills activities where appropriate • Help children develop a positive cultural identity and interact in a diverse society through reintegration, taking a disability-positive approach • Support referrals for additional therapeutic or health support where needed
Knowledge of child development and parenting	Parenting strategies that support physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development for all ages and developmental stages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate developmental expectations • Ability to create a developmentally supportive environment for child • Positive discipline techniques, ability to effectively manage child behavior • Recognizing and responding to your child's specific needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate developmentally-appropriate interactions with children during home visits • Provide information and resources on parenting and child development • Encourage caregivers to observe, ask questions, and try out new strategies through home practice • Provide disability-inclusive support and parenting training during parenting sessions and disability support groups
Attachment and nurturing	Parenting strategies that strengthen or rebuild connections and give children a sense of safety and security with a consistent caregiver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurturing parenting behavior • Ability to recognize and respond to behaviours of children who have experienced abuse, neglect or separation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information and resources on the impact of separation on child development and showing that nurturing care can support past traumas • Provide access to support networks that can support caregivers who are struggling to be nurturing, for example because of work necessity or disability-related stigma and worries • Link with support networks that can prevent and respond to violence against children, partner violence and family violence

Protective factor	What it is	What it looks like	How this can be supported through programs
Social support and connections	Positive relationships that provide emotional, informational, instrumental and spiritual support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple friendships and supportive relationships with others • Accepting help from others, and giving help to others • Skills and information to make connections with support networks, e.g., on disability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help families value, build, sustain and use social connections, including when children reintegrate or in family-based alternative care settings • Create an inclusive environment within group activities, e.g., addressing disability-related stigma • Facilitate mutual support, through group sessions and referrals to support groups • Promote engagement in the community and participation in community activities, including community awareness raising about family strengthening
Access to concrete support in times of need	Support and services that address a family's needs and help minimize stress caused by challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking and receiving support when needed • Knowing what services are available and how to access them • Adequate financial security, basic needs being met • Advocating effectively for self and child to receive necessary help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond immediately when families are in crisis, including immediate home visit and provision of ongoing case management support • Provide information and referrals to services in the community through group activities or home visits, including accompanying to visits • Help families to develop skills and tools they need to identify their needs and connect to supports, using a strengths-based approach

Annexure 2

Understanding what supporting families looks like

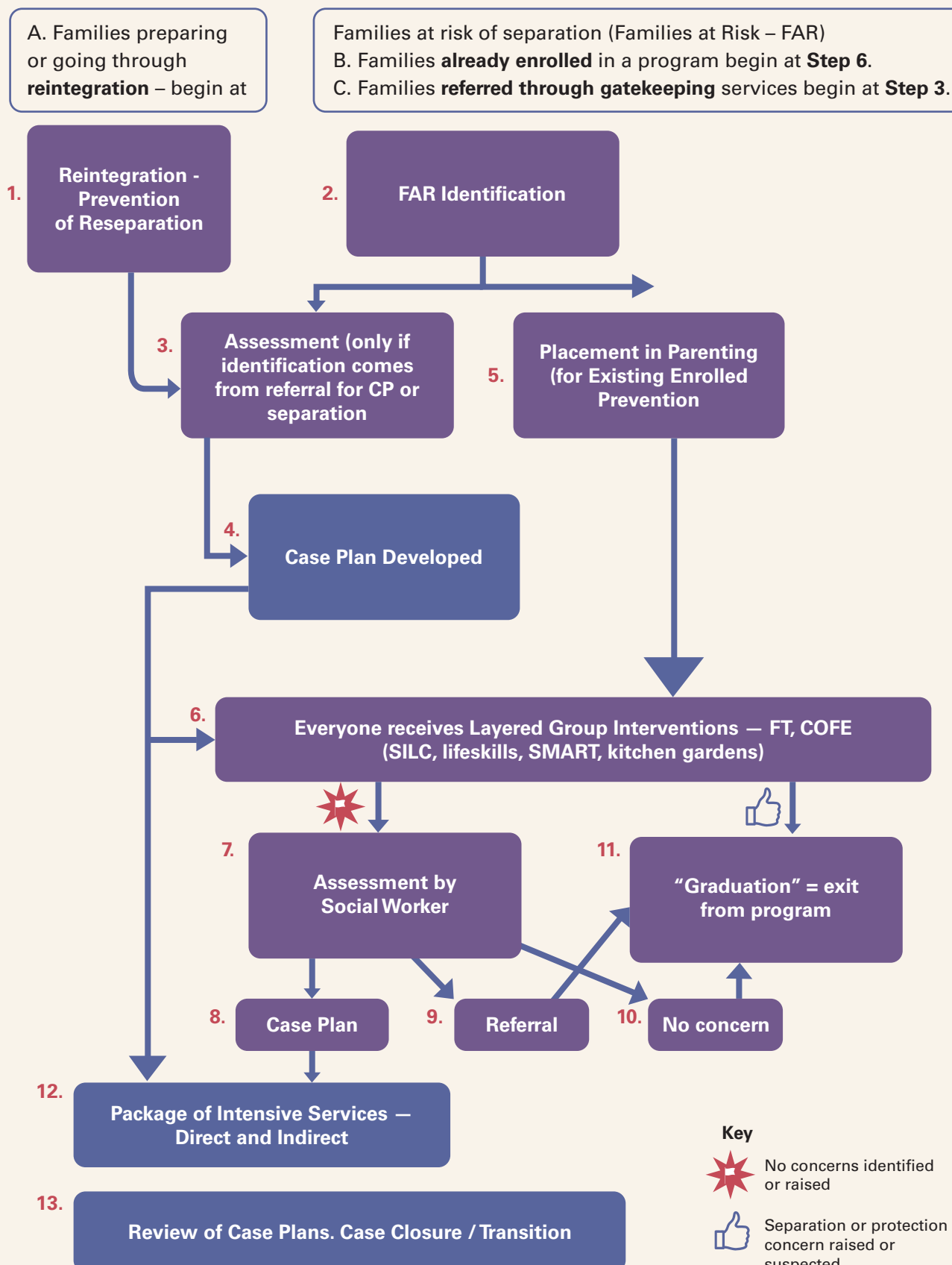
A family support system: What does it look like?



Annexure 3

Family Strengthening Pathways

This diagram illustrates an example pathway through which family strengthening support can be provided to all three categories of families: primary, secondary and tertiary.



1. Refers to families already receiving case management support for reintegration. They enter the family strengthening pathway during assessment of reintegration. Families are likely to start receiving family strengthening support after initial preparation for reunification or shortly before.
2. Identification of families at risk of separation continues through *either* community awareness or ongoing identification by gatekeepers, for example, if there is a serious risk of separation identified in the community or via a CCI.
 - Identification will use 'refined' criteria that can more accurately identify families *at risk of separation*, rather than all families that are in extreme poverty and/or vulnerable but that are never likely to separate.
 - Including disability, children who are thinking of or have already run away, contexts in which child labor is an option, settings in which there are CCIs that are 'pulling', e.g., by promoting themselves for education, families where there is already a known challenge with parent (including care leavers).
3. In some cases, a family will be identified and it is clear that there is already a priority risk that needs assessment. This might include: a family already separated (for example, a CCI may be approached by a family and refer to the family strengthening program), or in cases of child protection risk (where a child is at risk of immediate and serious harm). In such cases, the family will receive a full assessment.
4. If the assessment (step 3) finds that the family is in need of family strengthening and/or additional support, a case plan will be developed (as in the case of the reintegration process, using a prevention-specific assessment tool, that has been revised to reflect qualitative needs and children's voices).
5. All families that are in future to be identified through community awareness will not receive the screening and assessment process. They will be directly enrolled and invited to attend group sessions that already have shown evidence of family strengthening.
6. Layered group interventions begin with positive parenting and are followed by financial literacy. These can be provided to all.
 - Additional group interventions, including life skills, livelihoods and economic strengthening will be offered according to local availability and context.
- Enrolment will focus on the positive outcomes for families of attending group interventions; the expectation would be that this is the main goal of the program.
- Participation is optional.
- Caregivers in group sessions will not automatically receive home visits.
7. Group facilitators – the community-level workforce – will be supported to look for 'red flags' or 'triggers' while delivering group sessions. These will be where there is a concern about a family attending the group, e.g., if a family drops out, if others note a concern, or if a person discloses a concern. The concerns will relate to either imminent risk of family separation or to a serious child protection concern.
8. If the assessment identifies concerns that need tertiary level support, the family will receive a case plan that can include a full package of direct and indirect services. Group sessions will continue if the caregivers are able.
9. If the assessment identifies issues that can be resolved through referrals, these will be made and the VCP or social worker will ensure that the referral is made, followed up and completed. This may require ongoing home visits but not intensive case review.
10. If the assessment identifies no concerns relating to separation, the caregiver(s) continue group work and no additional action is taken.
11. For all families that are not either receiving case management support or having a referral followed up, once they complete the layered group services, they are deemed to have successfully graduated and can exit the prevention program.
12. For families that have received a case plan (reintegrating families and families at imminent risk of separation), they will receive group-based interventions jointly with the families that do not have a case plan and will additionally receive a tailored set of services and support in their individual case plan.
13. For families with a case plan, a case review, case conference and case closure will be applied and the family will exit the program when the case plan goals have been achieved.

Notes

[illegible]

Notes

[illegible]



Know more about IACN

Indian Alternative Care Network (IACN) is an alliance of organisations, academicians and practitioners dedicated to promote and strengthen family based alternative care for children without parental care or at risk of separation. IACN Secretariat is hosted at Butterflies and supported by UNICEF.

Read more about IACN here: www.iacn.in

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Changing The Way We CareSM (CTWWC) is implemented by Catholic Relief Services and Maestral International, along with other global, national, and local partners working together to change the way we care for children around the world. Our principal global partners are the Better Care Network and Faith to Action. CTWWC is currently funded in part by Catholic Relief Services and the GHR Foundation.



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