



SPOTLIGHT FOR OCTOBER 2005:

Family Strengthening Across Cultures: Parent Support Programs for Refugees

It is difficult to parent here. [My children] are much more American than we are, and it is difficult to get them to listen to us and to value our culture. [1]

This quote, from an East African refugee mother living in the United States, reflects the frustrations and challenges faced by many refugee and immigrant parents raising their children in a new country. Even experienced parents can face such difficulties in blending the cultures and practices of different countries.

Refugee parents need support in maintaining strong relationships with their children and in preventing problems that can limit their children's success in a new country. To aid refugee serving agencies in helping parents like the one quoted above, BRYCS has created a new resource, [**Raising Children in a New Country: A Toolkit for Working with Newcomer Parents**](#). The Toolkit includes:

- An overview of **research and good practice** in parent education programs for refugees
- Detailed information about **free and fee-based parent support and education resources** for refugee-serving agencies, including free access to certain curricula, handouts in different languages and reports
- Program development guidance, including **fundraising resources** and **evaluation tools**.

This Parenting Toolkit is ideal for mutual assistance associations (MAAs), refugee resettlement agencies, and other organizations providing parent support and education programs for refugees and newcomers.

BRYCS' goals in developing this parenting toolkit have been twofold:

1. To summarize the "state of the field" in parent support and education with refugee families, and
2. To gather concrete parenting resources, appropriate for use with refugee families, in an easily-accessible format for refugee-serving agencies.

This new BRYCS resource is designed to make it easier and feasible for refugee-serving agencies to establish effective parent support programs. The [Parenting Toolkit](#) is available in the BRYCS Clearinghouse in PDF format. Copies of the Toolkit, along with copies of many of the free resources mentioned in the Toolkit, are also available on CD-ROM ([email us to request a copy](#)).

Since its beginning, the BRYCS project has looked at ways to support refugee parents in the challenging task of raising children in an environment where the culture, language and customs are unfamiliar, while recognizing the inherent cultural and personal strengths that refugee parents bring to this responsibility. The "family strengthening" model of service delivery to families and communities is particularly applicable to refugee serving agencies. It is defined by the Family Strengthening Policy Center as:

A deliberate process of giving parents the necessary opportunities, relationships, networks, and supports to raise their children successfully, which includes involving parents as decision-makers in how their communities meet family needs. [2]

The BRYCS “Parenting Toolkit” can help refugee serving agencies implement a family strengthening approach in serving refugee families. Six characteristics of the family strengthening (FS) approach are listed below [3] along with some possible applications to the refugee serving context.

FS Characteristics	General Application	Refugee Service Application
Family Centered	Serving families as a unit, rather than just individual members	Supporting and/or re-establishing family cohesion, after the disruptions and traumas of displacement, by serving the whole family unit rather than just individual family members
Place Based	Families are served and supported in their own neighborhoods	Integrating refugees into their new homes and communities, helping them to understand the customs and mores of their local and national context
Collaborative	Services are seamless across different systems (such as health, education and community based organizations)	Making connections with mainstream service systems so that refugees are served appropriately and comprehensively, and so that refugee service providers do not operate in isolation from other service professionals
Focused on Family Self-Sufficiency	Families are empowered to carry out their responsibilities	Emphasizing economic self-sufficiency through employment (a fundamental goal of many government programs for refugees), and communal self-help through ethnic assistance associations
Accountable to Families	Families are involved in decision making and services are culturally responsive	Involving families in decision making about the methods and type of service delivery, and ensuring the cultural appropriateness of service methods
Preventive and Promotional	Services are provided before problems arise rather than waiting for crises	Developing programming to avert problems before they arise and assisting refugees in progressing from a “crisis” or “survival” mode to a more future-oriented preventive way of thinking (requiring time, modeling and support)

The family strengthening approach is a “framework based on the belief that the best way to protect and support children is by strengthening and supporting their families.” [4] In the spirit of this approach, the BRYCS Parenting Toolkit can help service providers to strengthen and support refugee families by recognizing their intrinsic assets and minimizing potential problems, and thereby help to protect and support refugee children by easing the difficulties for displaced parents raising children in a new country.

This month's featured search in the BRYCS clearinghouse provides a list of resources related to family strengthening.

- 1 Annie E. Casey Foundation (Fall 2003). Casey Connects, p. 1. Annie E. Casey Foundation: Baltimore, MD. Available on the Web at: <http://www.aecf.org/upload/PublicationFiles/connects%20fall%2003.pdf>
- 2 Family Strengthening Policy Center (October 2004). “Introduction to Family Strengthening” Policy Brief No. 1, p. 3.
- 3 National Human Services Assembly: Washington, DC. Available on the Web at: <http://www.nassembly.org/>
- 4 Ibid, p. 3.