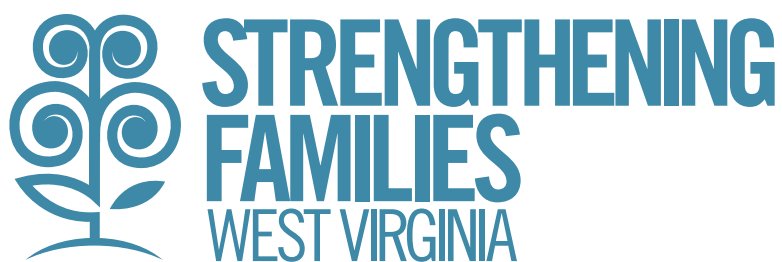




Strengthening Families through In-Home Family Education



Revised 2015

Acknowledgements

This booklet was developed by Prevent Child Abuse West Virginia to support and highlight the work of In-Home Family Education programs in West Virginia. We are extremely grateful to a number of groups and individuals, who provided their input and expertise in the development of the first edition of *Strengthening Families through In-Home Family Education*, including the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds, Debbie Withrow, Jackie Newson, Debra Harris Bowyer, and Michele Baranaskas. For this second edition, we are grateful for the expertise and assistance from the Center for the Study of Social Policy.

The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) developed the **Strengthening Families™ Protective Factors Framework**, with support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, as a strategy to promote optimal child development and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. Through its Strengthening Families National Network, CSSP helps child- and family-serving programs and systems assist families in the development of five research-based “protective factors” which contribute to child safety and well-being. CSSP provided valuable resources and support in the revision of this guide.

Finally, this project is being presented with financial assistance as a grant from the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources.

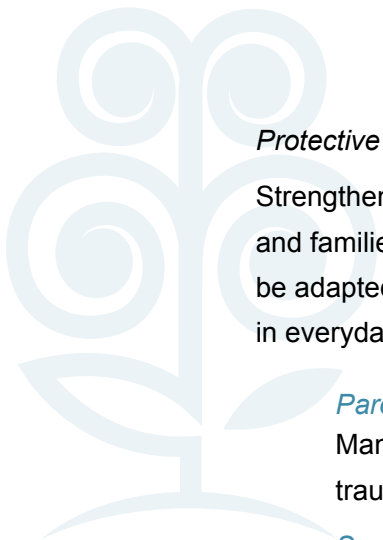


Background

In-Home Family Education

Early childhood home visitation, or In-Home Family Education as it is known in West Virginia, is a powerful strategy to promote positive childhood experiences, thereby preventing child abuse and neglect. In-Home Family Education is a voluntary program providing parenting education and support to families with young children in their homes. Educators help parents understand their role as their child's first and most important teacher. They provide information and support in such areas as prenatal care, child health, early learning and literacy, child development and behavior. They help connect families to resources in their community and help families stay together safely. This is done by emphasizing each family's strengths and helping them reach their goals. These programs help families build **protective factors**, which enable them to deal more successfully with whatever challenges arise. There are several models of early childhood home visitation in West Virginia that have met the rigorous research standards and been identified as models approved by the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program. Identified models include: Early Head Start – Home-Based Option; Healthy Families America; and Parents as Teachers. The West Virginia Maternal Infant Health Outreach Worker Program, from the Center for Health Studies at Vanderbilt University, is undergoing a research project as a Promising Approach.

Parents as Teachers National Resource Center, a *Strengthening Families* National Partner, has integrated the Protective Factors into their foundational training for Educators. The Foundational Curriculum incorporates the Protective Factors. Additionally, the *Partners for a Healthy Baby* curriculum developed a crosswalk, which aligns all of the materials and tools to the Protective Factors.



Protective Factors

Strengthening Families™ is an approach that can be applied to any interaction with children and families. It is a research-informed approach – not a model, program, or curriculum. It can be adapted to many different settings and models and involves small, but significant changes in everyday practice. The five Protective Factors are:

Parental resilience

Managing stress and functioning well when faced with challenges, adversity and trauma

Social connections

Positive relationships that provide emotional, informational, instrumental, and spiritual support

Knowledge of parenting and child development

Understanding child development and parenting strategies that support physical, cognitive, language, and social and emotional development

Concrete support in times of need

Access to concrete support and services that address a family's needs and help minimize stress caused by challenges

Social and emotional competence of children

Family and child interactions that help develop the ability to communicate clearly, recognize and regulate their emotions, and establish and maintain relationships



The Strengthening Families approach and In-Home Family Education program models share common values. With a focus on protective factors, rather than risk factors, family strengths are enhanced to buffer risk factors. Educators are in the home during the early years to assist families in identifying and recognizing their strengths. The Strengthening Families approach and In-Home Family Education believe that all families can use support and enhancement of the five protective factors, instead of services being targeted only to those families identified as “at-risk.”

In-Home Family Education Programs

- Facilitate friendships and mutual support
- Strengthen parenting
- Respond to family crises
- Link families to services and opportunities
- Facilitate children's social and emotional development
- Observe and respond to early warning signs of child abuse and neglect
- Value and support parents

Parental resilience

Social connections

Knowledge of parenting and child development

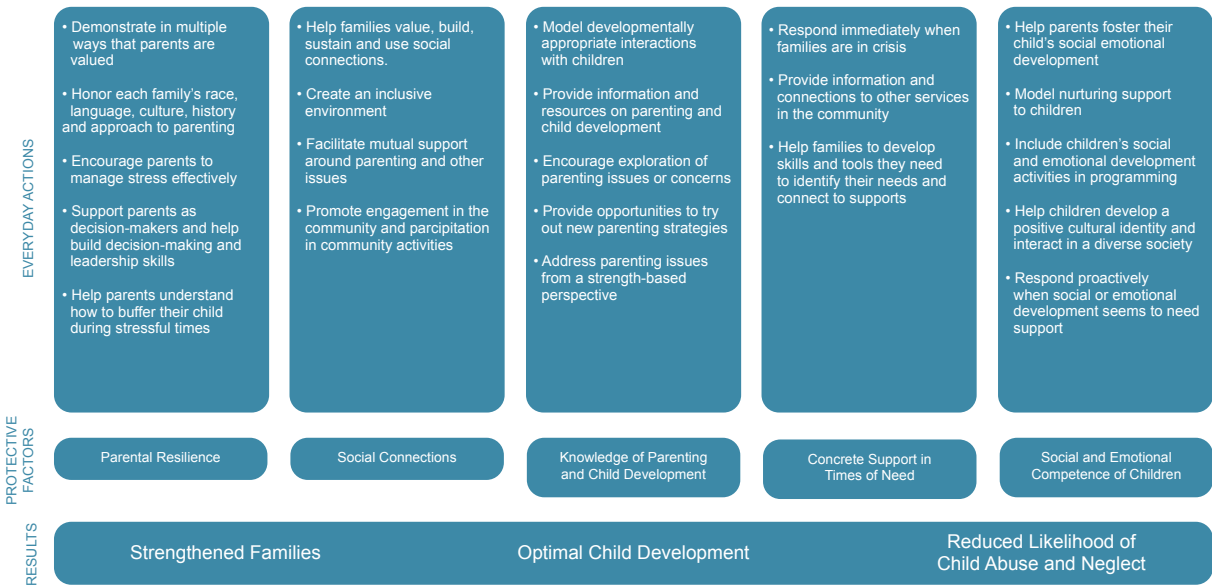
Concrete support in times of need

Social and emotional competence of children

Strengthened Families
Optimal Child Development
Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect

The Pathway to Improved Outcomes for Children and Families

Everyday Actions That Help Build Protective Factors



Protective Factors

Parental Resilience

Resilience is the ability to call forth inner strengths to proactively meet challenges and stressors of daily life. Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have. It involves thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed in everyone. According to the American Psychological Association, a combination of factors contributes to resilience.

The primary factor is having caring and supportive relationships within and outside the family. Other factors include:

- The capacity to make realistic plans and take steps to carry them out
- A positive view of yourself and confidence in your strengths and abilities
- Skills in communication and problem-solving and
- The capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses.

Resilient parents are able to respond productively to stressful situations by counting on the trusting relationships within the family and reaching out for help when it is needed. Parents who are emotionally resilient have a positive attitude, creatively solve problems, effectively address challenges, and are less likely to direct anger and frustration at their children. Parents who come from a childhood of abuse and neglect have often not experienced a caring, supportive and trusting relationship. Multiple life stressors, such as a childhood history of abuse or neglect, health problems, marital conflict, domestic violence and/or financial stressors may reduce a parent's capacity to cope effectively with the typical stresses of parenting.



What can In-Home Family Educators do to strengthen Parental Resilience?

In-Home Family Educators can enhance participating families' problem-solving skills. For example, an Educator can help a family identify a goal or two that they want to achieve as a family. To ensure the family's success, the goal should be SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-limited. Assist the family in breaking the goal into small short-term actions that will lead to meeting their goal. Regular checking in with the family on their progress provides the opportunity to celebrate their success and problem-solve how to overcome barriers to achieving the goal(s).

Identifying strengths of individuals in the family, as well as the family unit, and pointing these out to the family gives them the opportunity to build on these strengths. The Educator may need to do some coaching to begin a discussion about strengths, as some families' experiences have involved a focus on their problems and needs. A focus on strengths can provide the confidence they need to get through the difficult times.

In-Home Family Educators must be proactive in helping family members manage their anger and frustration. A crying baby or the stress of potty training can be triggers for all parents and can lead some parents to lose control. Discussing strategies and coping mechanisms with families give them the skills to handle these stresses.

It may be necessary for the In-Home Family Educator to provide information and referral for individuals in the family to access mental health counseling. Family members may have unresolved issues from their childhood, mental illness or the inability to manage intense feelings, which will impact on their parenting skills and potentially put their child at risk for abuse. The Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale and HITS Violence Screening Tool for Domestic Violence and Intimate Partner Violence can assist in the identification of issues. The Educator provides information and linkage to additional services to families that score within risk areas on these tools.

Social Connections

Having trusting relationships and being part of a social network goes a long way to decrease isolation – a major factor in child abuse and neglect. When parents have family and friends they can trust and confide in, they feel supported and are less likely to feel alone. Social networks that include other parents allow for conversations about the joys and challenges of raising children and the opportunity to pick up techniques and ideas that work (and observe some that don't). Social connection also includes neighbors and other members of a community who provide emotional support and concrete assistance.

What can In-Home Family Educators do to strengthen Social Connections?

In-Home Family Educators are able to reach rural and isolated families and serve as a parenting model. Visiting families in their home increases social connections for a family and may be the only opportunity for parents to talk to “other adults.” Providing a nonjudgmental listening ear can counteract negative influences from family members and friends who are critical of the parents. During the course of home visiting services, Educators can help the family identify and connect to sources of support in their community, such as churches, support groups, civic groups and clubs. Educators can also help isolated parents build the



social skills that will help them connect with other parents and maintain healthy relationships. In-Home Family Education programs can provide social connections by bringing participating families together for structured activities on a regular basis. In addition, families can learn about other events in the community, such as library story hours, through In-Home Family Education program newsletters, mailed announcements and communication on home visits. Social networking provides an excellent opportunity to promote In-Home Family Education and to engage families. Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn can be used by the Educator to build online social connections for participants. The In-Home Family Educator must keep appropriate professional boundaries and maintain confidentiality.

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

All parents need accurate and timely information about raising children and appropriate expectations for their behavior. Children thrive when parents provide not only affection, but respectful communication and listening, consistent rules and expectations, and safe opportunities that promote independence. Understanding child development, including fetal development, helps parents guide development and understand their child's behavior in the context of overall development. Parents need techniques and alternative ways of responding to their children than simply the ones they learned from how they were parented.

What can In-Home Family Educators do to strengthen Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development?

Educators share information on what to expect at each stage of child development using an approved curriculum, which varies according to the program model. Educators should consider adult learning styles and present this information based on each parent's primary style of learning. Each of us has a primary learning style - Visual, Audio or Kinesthetic. As an Educator, it is important for you to know your primary learning style, so that you avoid the mistake of presenting information only in your style, instead of considering the parent's style. As Educators are building a relationship with a family, they need to be assessing literacy levels to ensure that the family is able to understand the information being presented.

Bonding and attachment with the child happens throughout the pregnancy. Hearing the heart beat for the first time, seeing the ultrasound pictures, and feeling the first kick all lead to a connection to the child before they enter the world. Educators can emphasize the importance of fathers and other family members being involved in the pregnancy. Prenatal development information can be shared with the family for them to understand the baby's progress. Encourage parents to talk to their baby every day.

Educators also provide information on a wide range of parenting issues, such as discipline, sleeping, feeding, bathing, potty training, immunizations, etc. The trusting relationship between

the Educator and the family provides the foundation for this information to be presented at the “right” time when it is relevant to the family. Child-rearing practices are the primary means of passing on values, beliefs and behaviors. Educators can present new models of discipline, in a culturally sensitive way so that parents are receptive to the information and can find culturally appropriate ways to apply the ideas. Educators can use their relationship skills with parents to identify areas of resistance and explore these areas further with the parents.

Social networking is another avenue for providing information on child development and parenting. In-Home Family Educators can post information on a wide array of topics. Discussions with participating families can also include tips from the Educator on how to help parents choose credible parenting information on the internet.

Educators conduct periodic developmental screening on children in partnership with the parents, with most programs using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, 3rd Edition. Use the screening process as another opportunity to educate parents on typical development and activities they can do with their children to enhance particular developmental domains. The screening process helps parents better relate to their child and provide appropriate nurturing responses. For children that screen below “cut-off” levels, Educators should provide information to the parents on early intervention services, West Virginia Birth to Three. If these services are accessed by the family, Educators should work in partnership with early intervention to coordinate services with the family. This prevents duplication of services and the possibility of families becoming overwhelmed with too many service providers.

Educators can educate parents on childhood brain development. New parents are eager to absorb information because they are excited to learn about their babies. Explain that the first two years of life are critical for the formation of connections between brain cells. This can be critical for parents to connect this knowledge with the impact of their daily interactions with their child.

Concrete Support in Times of Need

Families who can meet their own basic needs and access essential services are better able to ensure the safety and well-being of their children. Basic needs include things like food, clothing, housing, education and/or job opportunities, and transportation. Other essential supports include a wide variety of services, such as child care, health care, substance abuse treatment, domestic violence and specialized services to meet the needs of children. Concrete supports can include formal service agencies and informal support from social connections, such as community and religious organizations.

Parents who are struggling to meet basic needs for their families are less able to focus on concerns like positive discipline and enhancing their child’s development. However, research



on early childhood brain development illustrates the urgency that babies can’t wait. Educators balance the focus on the needs of parents and the parents’ relationship with the child, despite the complexity of the parents’ individual needs. Brain development in young children is heavily influenced by environmental conditions. Children need positive interactions with the environment for critical neural pathways to develop in the brain.

What can In-Home Family Educators do to strengthen Concrete Support in Times of Need?

In-Home Family Educators provide a gateway for families to access other services and supports that the family may need. In-Home Family Educators need to be knowledgeable about community resources and give families the necessary information to access resources that are appropriate for their individualized needs. Other experienced home visitors and participating families are a wealth of information on what is available in the community.

Many agencies in the local community distribute resource directories, such as Head Start and Family Resource Networks. In-Home Family Educators can invite other agencies to participating family group activities to present information about their services and answer questions that families may have. West Virginia 211 with funding from the Department of Health and Human Resources provides a searchable database of available resources and volunteer opportunities. Call Specialists are also available to answer parents' questions. *Help Me Grow* is a free referral service that connects families with critical developmental resources for their children birth to 5.

Educators need to follow-up with the family on subsequent home visits to see if they were able to access the resource. Sometimes extra assistance is needed to overcome barriers to access, such as a lack of transportation and/or not understanding the paperwork requirements. This is another opportunity to enhance problem-solving skills and build social connections. Who can help the family by giving them a ride to the appointment? How do they get other places they need to go? What steps are necessary for the parent to obtain their child's birth certificate?

With the family's consent, the Educator can advocate for the family by calling the provider to clarify expectations and instructions. Educators can also meet families at the agency and provide coaching and support. With some participating families, the Educator may have to begin the relationship doing things for the family, but the relationship should move to doing with the family and finally, cheering the family on as they do it independently.

Social and Emotional Development of Children (also known as Infant Mental Health)

Supporting children's social and emotional skills helps the communication between parents and their children and can reduce tensions within the family. When parents, caregivers and others help children express their emotions and needs effectively, children are less likely to resort to tantrums, biting or fighting. Over time, better communication about feelings helps cement the important bonds that children have with parents and other adults.



The parent or primary caregiver providing warm, loving, and nurturing responses to the child creates secure attachment, bonding, trust and the ability to safely explore the world around them.

What can In-Home Family Educators do to strengthen the Social and Emotional Development of Children?

Educators share information on children's social and emotional development with families, including information on the various temperament traits of children. Children (and adults) vary significantly in the nine temperament indicators: Activity Level, Regularity, Adaptability, Approach/Withdrawal, Sensitivity, Intensity of Emotion, Distractibility, Mood Changes, and Persistence. It is the blending of these nine indicators that makes each of us unique. Parenting responses need to be considerate of each child's temperament. Educators can help parents examine their own temperament traits, as well as their child's to provide understanding and brainstorming of strategies for parents to respond appropriately.

The Educator can help families identify issues surrounding a healthy parent-child interaction and child growth and development. For some parents, it can be difficult for them to understand what their baby is "telling" them. Educators can share information on infant tasks, engagement and disengagement cues, and appropriate parenting responses. Educators should be aware of indicators of problematic parent-child attachment and strategies to intervene and address these situations.

In-Home Family Education programs also conduct social-emotional developmental screenings using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire-Social Emotional. Use the screening process as another opportunity to educate parents on typical social-emotional development and activities they can do with their children to enhance this developmental domain. If the results of the Social-Emotional screen indicate a delay, information on West Virginia Birth to Three should be shared with the family. The Educator can work with the family and Birth to Three to address any delays and challenging behaviors of the child.

What Local In-Home Family Education Programs Can Do to Build Protective Factors

The Center for the Study of Social Policy has developed an extensive self-assessment tool for home visiting programs. It illustrates how the Strengthening Families protective factors can be supported through "small but significant changes" in program practice. Within each protective factor, a set of Everyday Actions describe a variety of experiences and resources that programs can provide, which help families build and strengthen that protective factor. Each Everyday Action is accompanied by a list of concrete, actionable, observable and measurable items that programs can adopt. The Program Self-Assessment is applicable to home visiting programs of any size, budget, or structure.

On average, the self-assessment form can be completed in approximately 90 minutes. CSSP strongly recommends that programs create a Self-Assessment team that represents a number of different perspectives on the program, including:

- Administrative staff and/or program director
- Home visitors
- Parents who participate in the program

Programs may choose to enter their self-assessment data in the online Strengthening Families Evaluation Portal (www.strengtheningfamiliesevaluation.com), provided by CSSP's national partner, Mosaic Network. Programs can create an account, enter their self-assessment data, develop an action plan based on their self-assessment, and collect or enter parent surveys and staff surveys. A variety of reports can be generated in the system to help programs analyze and document their self-assessment results or help state-level administrators track aggregate data across programs.



In-Home Family Education programs can have Educators and other staff complete the online training modules of the *Bringing the Protective Factors Framework to Life in Your Work - a Resource for Action* [<http://www.ctfalliance.org/onlinetraining.htm>.] The training is free and the curriculum includes new materials on partnering with parents and addresses promising strategies to strengthen families for practitioners. National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds is pleased to make the online training available to support implementation of the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework.

The curriculum consists of seven courses, each designed to be about two hours in length, including an Introductory course, a course focused on each of the five protective factors (each exploring one or two program strategies) and a final review and reflection course that helps participants move from knowledge to action. The introductory course can serve as a brief, stand-alone Strengthening Families 101 training. At several points, participants have the option to select material that relates to specific areas of work, such as early care and education, child welfare or family support. The Alliance is providing this resource free of charge in order to support, expand and enhance work to strengthen and support families.

The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources: Bureau for Children, through a contract with Hornby, Zeller and Associates, developed the *West Virginia Family Survey* to measure protective factors in families participating in Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Programs. The Protective Factors survey questions were developed by FRIENDS and the University of Kansas. The survey is used in multiple programs across the state, including In-Home Family Education, and helps programs describe the population(s) they serve; assess the changes in any of the targeted protective factors; understand the families' perceptions of the program and services; and consider the protective factors and areas of programming that need more focus. The *West Virginia Family Survey – Protective Factors in Families served by Community-Based Prevention Programs* report, dated July 2012, found that 98% of In-Home Family Education respondents were respected by staff and felt comfortable discussing concerns. There was an increase in pre- and post-test scores for Concrete Support and Nurturing and Attachment.

Help Me Grow, a national model out of Connecticut Children's Hospital, has been adopted by the WV Home Visitation Program and is designed to:

1. Support families and providers in health care, early care and education, and human services in effective developmental screening to promote early detection;
2. Provide a centralized call center to assist families and professionals with connecting children to appropriate programs and services; and
3. Facilitate greater access to and collaboration among professionals, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies committed to promoting child development.

In-Home Family Education programs can refer families to *Help Me Grow* and use the service to find appropriate referrals for participating families. The system provides an opportunity to enhance knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need and the social and emotional competence of children. *Help Me Grow* is supported through the Office of Maternal Child and Family Health Systems Point of Entry unit. Families and providers can reach the Point of Entry Unit at 1-800-642-8522.



Resources/References

This booklet was developed using resources from many of the following organizations. Website information has been included for more information.

[American Academy of Pediatrics – Tips to Promote Social Emotional Health Among Young Children](http://www2.aap.org/commpepd/doch/mentalhealth/docs/SE-Tips.pdf) <http://www2.aap.org/commpepd/doch/mentalhealth/docs/SE-Tips.pdf>

[American Psychological Association](http://www.apa.org)
<http://www.apa.org>

[Center for the Study of Social Policy](http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net)
Many resources for Strengthening Families implementation in Home Visiting Systems:
<http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net>

[Early Head Start National Resource Center](http://www.ehsnrc.org)
<http://www.ehsnrc.org>

[FRIENDS National Research Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention](http://friendsnrc.org/cbcap-priority-areas/protective-factors)
<http://friendsnrc.org/cbcap-priority-areas/protective-factors>

[Healthy Families America](http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org)
<http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org>

[Help Me Grow West Virginia](http://www.dhhr.wv.gov/helpmegrow)
<http://www.dhhr.wv.gov/helpmegrow>

[In-Home Family Education](http://www.inhomefamilyed.com)
<http://www.inhomefamilyed.com>

[Maternal Infant Health Outreach Worker Program](http://www.mihow.org)
<http://www.mihow.org>

[Mosaic Network – Strengthening Families Evaluation Portal](http://www.strengtheningfamiliesevaluation.com)
www.strengtheningfamiliesevaluation.com

[National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds](http://www.ctfalliance.org)
<http://www.ctfalliance.org>

Bringing the Protective Factors Framework to Life in Your Work: Free online training
<http://www.ctfalliance.org/onlinetraining.htm>

Parenting Counts
<http://www.parentingcounts.org>

Parents as Teachers
<http://www.parentsasteachers.org>

Partners in Community Outreach
<http://www.wvpartners.org>

Strengthening Families West Virginia
<http://www.strengtheningfamilieswv.org>

Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Development
<http://www.challengingbehavior.org>

United States Department of Health and Human Services: Administration for Children and Families *Child Welfare Information Gateway: Enhancing Protective Factors*
<http://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/promoting/protectfactors>

United States Department of Health and Human Services: Health Resources and Services Administration: Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visitation Program
<http://mchb.hrsa.gov/programs/homevisiting/index.html>

West Virginia 211
<http://www.wv211.org>

West Virginia Home Visiting Program
<http://www.wvdhhr.org/wvhomevisitation>

West Virginia Home Visiting Portal
<http://www.homevisitwv.org>

West Virginia Infant/Toddler Mental Health Association
<http://www.nurturingwvbabies.com>

April 2015

Angie Whitley, MSW, LGSW



The Strengthening Families West Virginia logo

The Strengthening Families West Virginia logo was inspired by the West African Adinkra Symbol for strength (in mind, body and soul), humility, wisdom and learning. The Adinkra Symbols are primarily used in Ghana by the Ashanti people.

