

# LIVING

## the Protective Factors

HOW PARENTS  
KEEP THEIR  
CHILDREN  
SAFE AND  
FAMILIES  
STRONG



Kathy Goetz Wolf



## Inspiration from Parents Learning to Live the Protective Factors

*A few words of inspiration from parents who are working on building the protective factors in their families:*

“Working all day, you get tired of getting depressed. I know the things I need to do to make me strong and healthy. Go take care of yourself, exercise, eat right.”  
[Be Strong and Flexible]

“I need to be able to step back and be me, to separate. You need to have a life of your own, and your own social life.” [Parents Need Friends]

“Someone else has experience. Don’t be afraid to ask.” [Everybody Needs Help Sometimes]

“There is no pattern to raising a family.” [Being a Great Parent Is Part Natural and Part Learned]

“My parents were really strict. I had no voice. But my daughter and I communicate.” [Social and Emotional Competence of Children]

“I do the things my son likes to do. I even caught a frog with my bare hands—even though I’m a girly girl! I know he’s his own individual.” [Give Your Children the Love and Respect they Need]



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## the Protective Factors

KATHY GOETZ WOLF

be  
**STRONG**  
families



 ILLINOIS  
strengthening families  
POWERED BY THE STORY OF A BOLD IDEA A PROTECTIVE FACTORS FRAMEWORK

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## Foreword

We all want to awaken to our potential—to show the world the best of who we are. Strengthening Families Illinois and Be Strong Families are committed to assisting all family members with awakening to their potential as people, parents, and leaders. We do this by offering workshops, webinars, events (such as Love Is Not Enough to Keep Your Family Strong Parent Cafés), tools (such as Café Talk: Lets Get to the Heart of Family), and published written materials (posters, calendars, books, and articles).

This book is about how living the Strengthening Families protective factors can assist you in awakening to your potential as a parent. It is written to be simple and accessible. The ideas in it are ones you can take action on immediately. This book can be read cover to cover or you can do what I like to do with books: when you're dealing with something and feel like you need some wisdom or guidance, just flip it open to a page and read that page. Dive into it anywhere and soak up what you need. As you do that, I encourage you to follow what the Buddha says: "Believe nothing, no

matter where you read it, or who said it, no matter if I have said it, unless it agrees with your own reason and your own common sense.”

The wisdom in this book is not my own. It comes from many places. Perhaps the most important place is from people like you, the reader. The ideas suggested in the body of this book for living the protective factors come from the more than 600 Love Is Not Enough Parent Cafés that have been held in Illinois over the past four years. At these gatherings, parents have come together and shared wisdom and ideas for keeping their families strong and their children safe. I've collected it and synthesized it so it can be useful to people who have not been able to attend cafés. (For more information on Love Is Not Enough Parent Cafés, see page 92.)

For Strengthening Families Illinois and the parent leaders whose work made this book possible, there is nothing more important in life than our families. Keeping them strong, safe, and healthy is our top priority. Together we are learning how to do that better and better. We are also becoming one family. We understand that we are

all connected and what happens to any one of us—or any one of our children—happens to all of us. We also know that if we are strong and healthy as individuals and families our communities and our society will also be strong and healthy. If you agree with these ideas and are committed to keeping your own family strong and making a difference in your community, we invite you to join us by going to [www.strengtheningfamiliesillinois.org](http://www.strengtheningfamiliesillinois.org) or [www.bestrongfamilies.net](http://www.bestrongfamilies.net) and filling out our parent leader recruitment form. Or you are welcome to attend one of our many open events. Enjoy!

January 2012



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# Introduction:

## Protecting Your Family

### KEEPING YOUR FAMILY SAFE

A parent's most basic responsibility is to keep his or her children safe. As parents, we know this and we work hard to do it. What do you think of when you think of keeping children safe? Most people think of things like keeping them away from dangerous people and things. We start early by putting car seats in our cars, telling people who want to hold our baby to wash their hands and make sure they support the baby's head, covering electrical sockets, and installing safety locks on cupboards where we keep products that could be poisonous to our children. We bundle up our babies when it's cold outside. We are careful who we ask to babysit. And we continue

**A PARENT'S MOST BASIC** responsibility is to keep his or her children safe.

this effort to keep them safe as they grow. We help them to protect themselves by teaching them to avoid talking to strangers and never let people touch them inappropriately. We keep them indoors if it's dangerous to play outside, and we warn them to look both ways before crossing the street. We also protect our children by providing for their basic needs—food, clothing, shelter—so they don't get sick. And we take them to the doctor when they do get sick. A lot of our effort to be good parents goes into keeping our children safe, and we do thousands of things each day to protect and provide safety for our kids.

Often when we think about this issue of safety, we are most concerned with outside threats. As our children grow, we spend a lot of mental and emotional energy worrying about the situations they could get into when we're not there to protect them. About people in the neighborhood. About safety at school and while waiting at the bus stop. Protecting them from bullies and even from teachers who might not understand them or like them or who might hurt their self-esteem. We do what we can to teach our children to defend and protect themselves both physically and emotionally. If they

hurt, we hurt. So we work with them to protect them and we help them deal with the situation when they do get hurt. That's who we are as parents.

A lot of parenting information—books, websites, classes by experts—assumes that parents are their children's first teacher, their ally, and their protector. Much information is meant to assist parents in their efforts to protect and nurture their children. You can buy lots of products: google "child safety" and you will be overwhelmed by how many things there are to think about, buy, and do to keep your children safe from outside threats. Much of this is necessary and valuable.

And ... the Strengthening Families movement in this country believes that this perspective misses something very important! **What is missing is that the first priority of a parent is to keep your children safe from internal threats within the household—to keep your children safe from you (on your worst day)!**

## PROTECTING YOUR FAMILY FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Let's keep it real and be brave. Ready to face the hard facts? Safety starts with you. Your strength. Your maturity. Your peace. Your ability to keep it together. Your ability to be safe and act safe. Even as a society, we often don't think about or invest in parents. We have health insurance for children, but not necessarily for their parents. Yet what puts a child more at risk than a sick parent?

If you can't function, your child is in danger. If you are not being safe for you, then you are putting your children at risk. This is deep, and you might not have thought about it this way, but all of your choices for you—all of your risky behaviors—impact the safety of your children and your family. What happens to you matters for your children: If you drink too much and pass out at home in front of the TV. If you drink and drive. Even if you eat too much of the wrong things and get diabetes and high blood pressure. If you break the law and end up in trouble with the authorities, it affects more people than you. These choices and their

consequences affect the health, well-being, and safety of your children.

Similarly, you can protect your children from outside threats all day long, but when they are home with you, if they are not safe or do not feel safe, it messes them up. Child abuse happens at home. So does domestic violence. We try to distance ourselves from these words and these concepts, put our heads in the sand, and cluck our tongues: “That happens to other people, in other places, that’s not me.” When we do that, we also know that we’re not telling the truth. We need to look seriously at our homes: To what extent are they sanctuaries? Are they where the heart is? Are they peaceful refuges from the craziness and stress of the outside world?

To what extent do we speak to our children in ways that are hurtful, disrespectful, rude, crude, or damaging? Do we injure them physically or emotionally out of our own fear, anger, or lack of control? Do we ignore or neglect their needs because we’re busy pursuing our own happiness, satisfaction, or pleasure—or because we’re absorbed in our own issues and pain? Do our

children see or hear things that scare or traumatize them that we could avoid if we would think of them instead of ourselves? Or just plain think?

These are hard questions and they apply to all parents—old and young, rich and poor, of all ethnicities and races.

Most abuse is not reported. Most neglect does not come to the attention of the authorities, especially in privileged, middle-class families that have the resources to keep the authorities away. Whole books have been written on this and it's not my intent here to prove this point. But just because something looks pretty doesn't mean it is pretty. We need to acknowledge when we're "fronting," hiding, and putting on a show for the outside world. We are good at doing that, as a way of protecting our privacy—and also to keep ourselves moving and surviving. All that is fine and necessary if what's going on behind the wall is positive. But to the extent that it's not—if we have a hot mess that stinks to high heaven going on and we know it—then let's deal with it!

No parent likes to think of himself or herself as an abuser. We tend to think of the threats to our kids as happening outside of us. Yet, every single one of us knows that on our worst day, we can cause major damage: to ourselves and to our relationships, including our relationships with our kids. The potential for violence, for losing our temper, for ignoring other people's rights and needs while we pursue our own, is within all of us. The way we act and how we think, the words we say, the things we do, the way we feel—all of these factor into the environment we create for ourselves and our children—our families. What kind of home are we building? Is it an emotionally and physically safe environment? Are we doing all we can to keep our families strong?

**The main point here is that protecting your family starts with being a safe place yourself.**

This book comes to you from Strengthening Families Illinois and Be Strong Families—which are part of a national movement to build

**MOST NEGLECT** does not come to the attention of the authorities, especially in privileged, middle-class families that have the resources to keep the authorities away.

strong, healthy families and to keep children safe. The book is for parents who know about the Strengthening Families movement. (For more information, you can go to [www.strengtheningfamilies.net](http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net) or [www.beststrongfamilies.net](http://www.beststrongfamilies.net).)

In *Strengthening Families Illinois* and *Be Strong Families*, we start from the fact that parents love their kids and from the insight that love is not enough. What does this mean? It means that the feeling of love—the idea of love—can be something that we use to make ourselves feel good as parents. Who doesn't love their kids? We can hide behind this idea of love while we do all kinds of things that are not positive and don't build strong, peaceful, and positive family relationships. Just loving our kids that way is not enough. We need more than the feeling of love to keep our families strong—we need to take responsibility for doing the right things, for making sure we build the protective factors in our

**WE NEED TO PUT  
OUR LOVE** into  
positive action.

families. We need to put our love into positive action.



## THE PROTECTIVE FACTORS

When Strengthening Families Illinois was first getting started, one of the parent leaders who was on the leadership team said, “You have important information that parents need to keep their families strong, give it to us directly ... and don’t dumb it down.” What Jeffrey Scott was talking about was the six protective factors. Research says that when these six qualities are present in families, children are safe and families are strong. The protective factors are like the ingredients of a strong and healthy family. Having these factors in families protects kids.

The protective factors are:

### **Parental Resilience—Being Strong and Flexible.**

This is the ability to bounce back when life knocks you down. It is about your own psychological and emotional well-being. Your ability to show up and to respond to the pressures of life, not just to react to whatever happens. This is your ability to be in control of your thoughts, your emotions, and your actions.

**Social Connections—Parents Need Friends.**

These are the positive people in your life who give you emotional support and assistance. It's your community, which has your back so you can take care of your kids. It's also the people who can assist you with your kids.

**Concrete Support in Times of Need—Everybody Needs Help Sometimes.**

This is the reality that life happens to all of us and no one is immune to catastrophe. No matter who you are or what you currently have, you are maybe one illness, one fire, one job loss away from being in a really bad way. This protective factor tells us that it is a sign of strength to ask for help when you need it.

**Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development—Being a Great Parent Is Part Natural and Part Learned.**

Children don't come with a manual. We all know the great things our parents did that we want to pass on to our own kids and also the things that we don't want to repeat. Parenting is a continuous learning process—it's important to have realistic expectations for our children. For that, we need to know some basics about how children develop and what they're capable of at different stages.

**Social and Emotional Competence of Children –Parents Need to Help Their Children Communicate.** Children need to learn how to manage their emotions, express their needs and feelings, deal with conflict, and get along with others. Parents have a big role in teaching their children all of these skills.

**Healthy Parent-Child Relationships—Give Your Children the Love and Respect they Need.** This means recognizing that the relationship with your children is a relationship and that their feelings matter, their dignity matters. It recognizes that everything else that happens in parenting—nurturing, disciplining, shaping and assisting a child's growth—happens through this relationship of mutual love and respect.

## **BUILDING OR TEARING DOWN PROTECTIVE FACTORS**

Strengthening Families Illinois and Be Strong Families exist to make parents aware of the importance of the protective factors and to assist them in building them in their families. This book is based on the wisdom and insights of parents who have participated in Love Is Not

## Children Learn What They Live

*By Dorothy Law Nolte, Ph.D.*

If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.

If children live with hostility, they learn to fight.

If children live with fear, they learn to be apprehensive.

If children live with pity, they learn to feel sorry for themselves.

If children live with ridicule, they learn to feel shy.

If children live with jealousy, they learn to feel envy.

If children live with shame, they learn to feel guilty.

If children live with encouragement, they learn confidence.

If children live with tolerance, they learn patience.

If children live with praise, they learn appreciation.

If children live with acceptance, they learn to love.

If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves.

If children live with recognition, they learn it is good to have a goal.

If children live with sharing, they learn generosity.

If children live with honesty, they learn truthfulness.

If children live with fairness, they learn justice.

If children live with kindness and consideration, they learn respect.

If children live with security, they learn to have faith in themselves and in those about them.

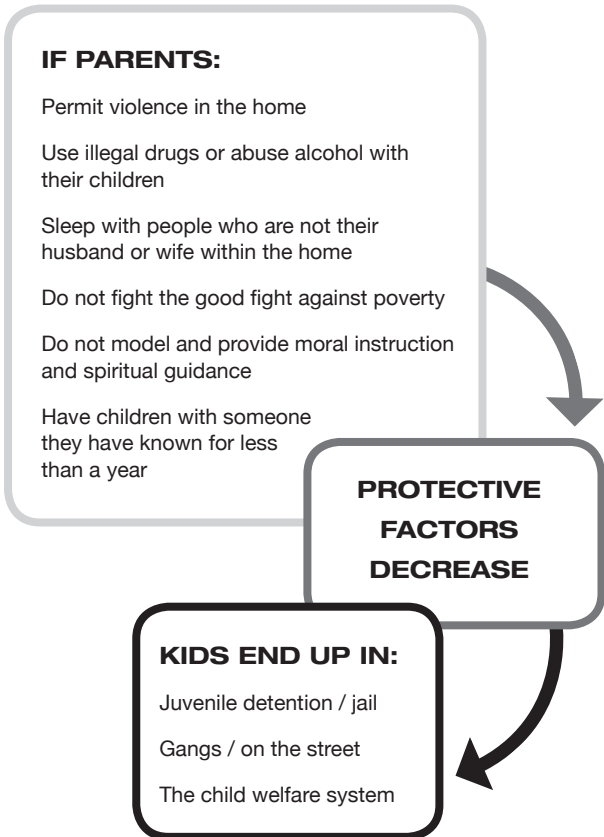
If children live with acceptance and friendship, they learn to find love in the world.

Enough Parent Cafés—where thousands have shared how they build the protective factors in their families. If you look at any strong, healthy family, you will find the protective factors. Once you know them, you will be able to recognize them. They are not mysterious, and they are not theoretical. They are the real and practical building blocks of healthy family life.

Similarly, Erwin McEwen (aka “Mac”), who has been in the child welfare field for more than 30 years, most recently as director of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, offers insight into how protective factors decrease with the choices families make and how that leads to negative outcomes for children. He uses the graphic on the following page in many public presentations.

When Mac talks about this slide, the first thing he says is that it’s about things that are “none of the state’s business”—because they have to do with adult choices that are not child abuse. For

**FAMILIES  
INCREASE OR  
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the choices they make.



example, it's not child abuse if you hit your husband or wife, only if you hit your child. But parents beating on each other takes a toll on the children and certainly decreases the protective factors in the home. With more than 30 years in the child welfare field, Mac also has some insight and wisdom regarding how children end up there—or on the streets, in gangs, or in juvenile detention facilities. In his view, it relates directly to the presence or absence of protective factors in the home.

We may think that the adult choices we make for ourselves (that are none of the state's business)—such as our drug or alcohol use, who we sleep with or have children with, whether we go to church or not, what our values are and how we live them, how we talk to people, how we bring income into our families, how we fight with our adult partners or friends—are just that, our choices. They don't have anything to do with children. They do not have anything to do with child abuse if they are not actions or behaviors that directly affect our kids. Yet the way we live our lives does increase or decrease protective factors. Specifically, Mac says, the six things at the top of the graphic are important ways parents decrease protective factors.

All of them impact multiple protective factors and all of them also affect the parent-child relationship—the sixth protective factor. That’s because children make assessments, decisions, and choices for themselves if they trust and respect the adults in their lives. If parents are violent or permit violence in the home, if they sleep around, if they drink to excess and don’t work—this undermines the parent-child relationship, decreases protective factors, and results in bad outcomes for kids: gangs, juvenile detention centers, foster care. In the case of drug use, even very young children know that the person who went into the bathroom is different than the one who came out.



## Living the Protective Factors

What you do as a person and as a parent matters. Because being a parent is being a leader, the choices you make as an adult in your household motivate and inspire your kids to act a certain way—or they don't. You have control of this! You have the potential, wherever you are and whatever choices you've made in the past, to make better ones going forward. The protective factors can assist you—not only as a framework that lives in your head—but in day-to-day life: You can live the protective factors. The goal of this book is to break it down—to show how you can awaken to your potential as a parent by living the protective factors.

Whenever your family faces a challenge you can think to yourself: “These are not problems or challenges, only

**YOU HAVE THE POTENTIAL,**  
wherever you are and whatever choices you've made in the past, to make better ones going forward.

opportunities. Which protective factor do I need to build in order to get this situation figured out?" Then look at the strategies in this book or at [www.beststrongfamilies.net](http://www.beststrongfamilies.net). Just as many people in professions that serve families across the United States use the protective factors as a framework for providing services, you can use the protective factors to understand what's happening in your family and steer them through difficult times. You can live the protective factors!

How will you live the protective factors? There are three main ways: (1) Take Care of Yourself, (2) Be a Strong Parent, and (3) Build a Healthy Relationship with Each of Your Children. Each of the following sections covers one of these ways. (These are the same themes as the Love Is Not Enough Parent Cafés and cover the same

**YOU CAN USE  
THE PROTECTIVE  
FACTORS** to

understand what's happening in your family and steer them through difficult times. You can live the protective factors!

protective factors.) Within each section, each chapter gives helpful "rules"—which came from parent cafés—on how to live the protective factors to keep your children safe and your

family strong. The ideas we offer are not the only ideas out there. The list is not comprehensive. Feel free to make your own rules. Figure out what it means for you to live the protective factors in your own life and to build the protective factors in your family.

Living the protective factors requires making a commitment. Practicing what you learn is a lifelong discovery process. Like many worthwhile things in life, living the protective factors is not easy. But as one of my most influential teachers, GuRubee, says, “Easy is metaphysically negative.” This means that in the physical world, we like easy because it is pleasurable and feels good. However, we grow toward our best selves when we work hard, concentrate, and exercise discipline and control over our thoughts, words, and actions. As we practice this, we transcend the physical and realize we are spiritual beings. Struggle is positive if we struggle to uplift ourselves, our children, and our communities. We do this by living the protective factors.

## Part One: Take Care of Yourself

### **Protective Factors:**

Be Strong and Flexible (Parental Resilience)

Parents Need Friends (Social Connections)

Everybody Needs Help Sometimes (Concrete Support  
In Times of Need)

## Part Two: Be a Strong Parent

### **Protective Factors:**

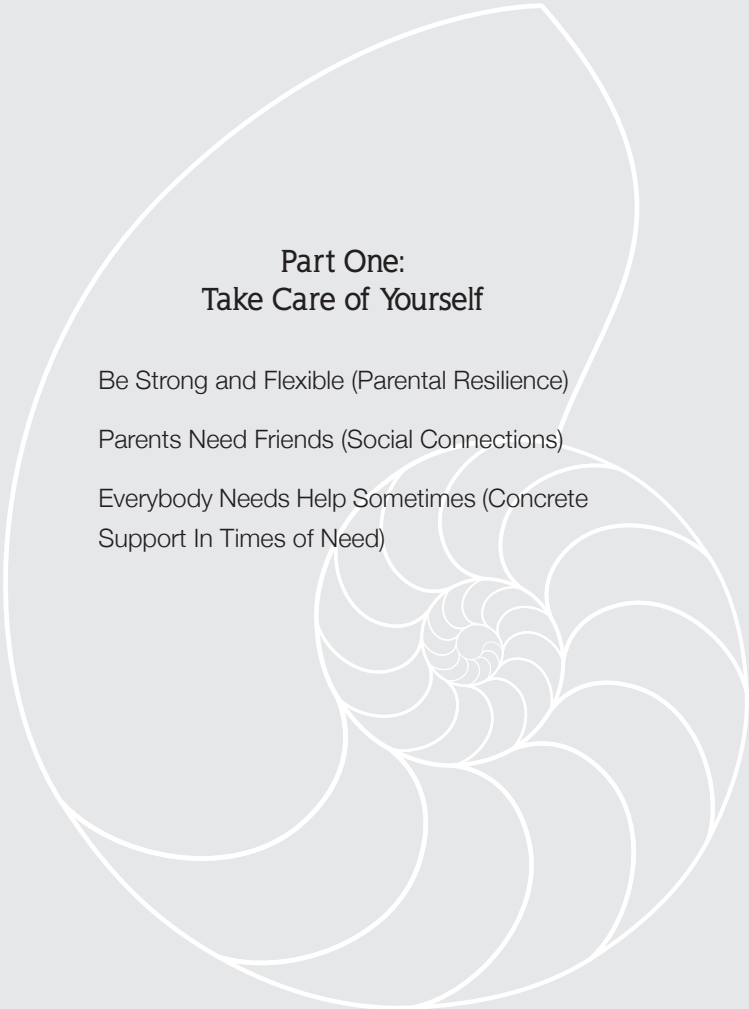
Being a Great Parent Is Part Natural and Part Learned  
(Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development)

## Part Three: Build a Healthy Relationship with Each of Your Children

### **Protective Factors:**

Give Your Children the Love and Respect They Need  
(Healthy Parent-Child Relationship)

Help Your Children Communicate (Social and  
Emotional Competence of Children)



## **Part One: Take Care of Yourself**

Be Strong and Flexible (Parental Resilience)

Parents Need Friends (Social Connections)

Everybody Needs Help Sometimes (Concrete  
Support In Times of Need)





## 1 PRAY.

The number-one answer to the question we ask in Love Is Not Enough Parent Cafés—“How do you stay strong and flexible for you and your family?”—is some variation on “I pray.” For many people, prayer is a mainstay of their life and a relationship with God is clear and obvious. They routinely open their hearts to their Creator, feeling secure in the Creator’s love, care, and involvement in their lives. So, when it comes to staying strong and flexible and dealing with life’s challenges—and bouncing back from adversity—their faith that everything is in divine order and their knowledge that praying completes the relationship is the foundation for everything else. Talking to God is a way to relieve stress and solve problems. Whether or not this is true for you, whether or not you believe in God in the traditional sense or are part of any organized religion, prayer can work. In its essence, prayer is the act of humbling yourself in the face of something more powerful, describing the situation and what you need and intend, and putting it out there in the Universe. It is also an act of relaxing and

releasing—letting go and trusting that all will be well. So, whether or not you “believe in God” or consider yourself a Christian or a Jew or a Muslim—try sitting quietly, adopting a prayerful attitude, and intentionally connecting to your Source, your Highest Self, or the Universe and asking for what you really want and need. Prayer simultaneously sets an intention and sees the fulfillment of this intention—or something better—as already reality. Praying is practicing bringing the future into the present with humility.



### **Questions for Reflection**

How does trusting that everything will work out for the best contribute to your well-being?

How are you connected to the process of creation, being a creator, creativity?

How are power and love active in your spiritual life?





## 2 MEDITATE.

Meditation has some things in common with prayer, but it is different. Meditation is the process of being led from within to a universal center of calm awareness and inspired intuition. There are many techniques for meditation, but one of the simplest is to just sit quietly and focus on your breath. You watch as thoughts go by, releasing them as soon as you become conscious that you are thinking them. This is the practice of stopping your train of thought—examining and confronting the content of your thoughts. Often people feel at the mercy of their minds, not recognizing where many of their thoughts come from. Programmed reactions, negative habits, and traumatic memories are stored as emotional thought forms. Through meditation, we develop the ability to change our thought patterns and reintegrate healthy thinking into the mind. As we develop our meditative mind, we find ourselves able to slow down as we go about our lives and become conscious of our emotional reactions. We become able to exercise choice and respond non-emotionally to things that provoke us. Even 10 minutes a day of meditation can make a big difference in your quality of life.



## Questions for Reflection

What are the benefits of taking some time to relax deeply and not think?

What is your experience with being in control of your thoughts and observing your mind in action?

How do you decide which thoughts serve you and which ones you will not have in your mind?

## ACTIVITY

Find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed. Sit quietly and tune into your breath. Just observe it going in and out. Don't try to change it. Pay attention to the thoughts that go through your mind. As soon as you notice you are thinking something, let it go. Wait for the next thought to come. Do this for five minutes. Write down what your thoughts were. Do this practice every day for a week and look at your thoughts. Which thoughts were positive? Which thoughts were negative? How can you have more positive thoughts?



### 3 BUILD YOUR A-TEAM.

In Awaken to Your Potential: As a Person, As a Parent, As a Leader (a transformational workshop journey offered by Strengthening Families Illinois and Be Strong Families) we learn about anabolic and catabolic energy: Anabolic energy is positive and it builds. Catabolic energy is negative and it tears down. Your A-Team is your Anabolic Team—people who assist you with staying positive and people who can assist you with getting the things done you need to get done. Because energy attracts like energy, if you are not positive, you may not have positive people and positive energy around you. You can change this by setting the intention to build your A-Team—by spending time with people who make you feel good and distancing yourself from people who tear you down. Be careful here to include people on your A-Team who you trust to tell you the truth, not just to feed your ego. People on your A-Team keep you positive by contributing to you growing stronger, healthier, and more aware. They sometimes make you work to bring out the qualities in you that you value the most. Your A-Team members are your go-to people

when you need some assistance being lifted out of a negative state. They may be close friends or family members, but not always. Sometimes they are people we don't know all that well who make important contributions to our lives.



### Questions for Reflection

Who are the people in your life who bring positive energy in—who make you smile and make you feel like everything will work out?

How do the people you spend time with daily bring you up or pull you down?

Whose A-Team are you on?

### ACTIVITY

Get a piece of paper and a pen. Leave room at the top of the page for a title. Write down all the qualities of people you respect and admire and would like to be like. Write quickly. Let the words flow. When you are finished, put the words "I AM" in the place you left for a title. Now read the list again. Post it in a place in your home where you can see it every day.



## 4 STAY ON YOUR SQUARE.

It's a cliché because it is true that the only thing you can control in life is you! Your body, mind, spirit (or energy and attitude) are yours to create and mold. Often when we are uncomfortable or plagued by emotions we have difficulty tolerating—fear, sadness, guilt, shame, disappointment, anger—we look outside ourselves for solutions. We go into blaming mode—“It's his fault I'm ...”—or we try to fix someone else. We think if someone else just did or said something different, we would feel better, be happy. Because of this thought, we direct and invest energy to make this happen. This can look like helping, pleasing, begging, arguing, demanding, manipulating, or a number of other things—but it's all the same energy because it's the same intent. When we start focusing on changing someone else, we come off our square and start going down a path that at best provides a temporary fix and at worst drains our personal power, keeps us from doing the work we need to do on ourself, and makes us slaves to someone else's feelings, thoughts, and actions. Staying on your square is minding your own business, having good boundaries, focusing on

making yourself strong and flexible. Staying on your square is practicing being the person you should be and trusting others to do the same.



### **Questions for Reflection**

How does staying focused on being who you want to be make you stronger and more flexible?

Think of some times you have gotten into someone else's business. Why does this happen? What do you get out of it?

What does it feel like to take total responsibility for all your thoughts and emotions?

When do you turn outside when you should go within?  
How can you change this habit?



## 5 DO THE RIGHT THING.

Everybody has conscious values that they have chosen to build their life around, and everyone has a moral compass. We feel good—strong and flexible—when we are aligned with our core self, acting in concert with our chosen conscious values. And we thrive when we feel in control of our life, when we act in ways that we respect. Often in life, we get rocked by events and by other people and we get off our path and feel lost. You know what's right ... and what's not. When you act in ways that are aligned with your core values, you feel good about yourself and you take care of yourself. This helps build your resilience so you can stay strong and flexible. When you don't take care of yourself you can feel out of control, like you're spiraling downward. Energy has momentum—positive energy builds positive momentum. Negative energy builds negative momentum. It takes willpower to change direction when you're going the wrong way, to shift the momentum in a positive direction. In any moment you have the power to choose to turn around and go in the right direction.



### **Questions for Reflection**

How are you taking care of yourself by doing the right things?

How are you betraying yourself by going against what you know is good for you and your family?

In what areas of your life are you building and in what areas of your life are you off your path?

What is the next positive choice you need to make to turn things around?

What are the values that you live your life by?





## 6 BE POSITIVE.

Positive thoughts, emotions, and actions are an important part of taking care of yourself. So much is written about the power of positive thinking—if you can change your thoughts, you can change your life. Negative emotions can stop you in your tracks and lead to negative actions. Any time you experience a negative emotion, there is a thought underlying it that you can change. If you change the thought, the emotion and the action will follow. For example, we think that we have problems. You can list the problems, dwell on the problems, and feel overwhelmed by them. If we shift this thinking from having problems to having opportunities, it changes everything. Suddenly, everything we experience is a gift for us, a way for us to triumph, and to get stronger and clearer. It can be a huge challenge to find the opportunity waiting for us in the middle of a problem, but we can choose to know it's there and dedicate ourselves to finding it. Being positive requires discipline. And it is possible for all of us—not just for some of us. Positivity is the sister of resilience, the ability to bounce back when something knocks us down. Positivity and faith allow us to make good choices and to be victorious in the face of adversity.



### **Questions for Reflection**

How do your words, thoughts, and actions reflect your commitment to being positive—or negative?

What assists you in staying positive?

What is the main opportunity in the biggest problem you have? How does thinking about it as an opportunity change the feelings you have about it?

What thoughts do you need to change?



## 7 BREATHE.

Your mind follows your breath. When we're under stress, we sometimes forget to breathe.

We all know that in a particularly stressful situation, when you're about to lose control, taking some deep breaths slows down the action and restores some peace. You can use your breath to change your mood and to bring you back to a place of calmness and strength. In general, the slower and deeper you breathe, the calmer and more positive you will be.



### Questions for Reflection

How can you use your breath to stay calm, centered, and positive?

When is the last time you took a deep breath? More than one?

How do you use your breath to connect to your calm, wise self?

## ACTIVITY

Time how many breaths you take in one minute (one inhalation and one exhalation count as one breath). The average person breathes 15 times. To have positive energy, try to bring it down to eight. Count to four as you inhale. Count to four as you exhale. Slowing down your breath will slow down your emotions and will give you time to think before you act.



## 8 REFRAME HELPING.

Help is not a strong word—the whole notion of help can make people feel helpless and powerless—like they are giving up control and admitting defeat. It feels like when it's time for help, the situation has gotten out of control. All kinds of negative emotions—like guilt, weakness, and shame—are attached to needing help. So, how can we reframe the whole issue of helping so that it's easier to reach out and fix things before they get nasty? One way is to reframe “help” as “assistance.” Assistance is different from help. Assistance is something that everyone needs. There is less shame in giving or receiving assistance than help, because you don't lose your power when you ask for assistance—it is assumed that you are working hard, too. Another way to reframe help is to understand that people like to be helpful, they like to assist; it makes them feel good, strong, and powerful. So, it is a gift to others to ask for assistance or help, to let someone pitch in and do something positive for you and your family. The third way to reframe helping is to get your ego out of the way—to realize that when you need assistance more than you and your pride are

at stake. Acknowledging this and seeing the situation clearly allows you to take action to improve it. Letting it get worse by insisting on going it alone is what your ego may want, but it results in more suffering for you and your kids.



### **Questions for Reflection**

Who do you assist and how do you feel when you do it?

What gets in the way of you asking for or receiving assistance?

How are the ideas of teamwork, partnership, friendship, or community related to assistance?

When and how are we stronger together than alone?



## ME TIME.

It is easy to feel that our top priority should be taking care of business—taking care of our children and meeting their needs, taking care of our partners and meeting their needs, working to put food on the table, etc. Many of us move from one obligation to the next and we get tired and we feel drained, and we get sick, depressed, and overwhelmed by giving all the time. And yet somehow our egos feel virtuous because if we are miserable enough giving everything we've got to others, we must be good people, right? It's almost like the worse we feel the stronger and better we must be, right? Wrong. The opposite is true. In order to be our best for other people, we need to take care of ourselves. This means taking time out to relax and rejuvenate—and maybe even splurging on ourselves. People do this in many different ways: taking a hot bath, going for a walk, being in nature, meditating, exercising, getting a massage, reading a book or a magazine, going to the movies, shopping, attending a yoga class, listening to music, playing cards, calling a friend, laughing. Which activity we choose doesn't matter—what matters is that we do

it! We value ourselves enough to take time for and be kind to ourselves. When we do this, we set an example and teach our children that it's okay to do this when they get older.



### **Questions for Reflection**

Where does your well-being come in your list of priorities?

What relaxes and rejuvenates you?

How do you ensure that you take “me time”?





## 10 PUT SOME DISTANCE BETWEEN YOU AND NEGATIVE ENERGY.

Just like one of the ways to stay physically healthy is to limit your exposure to sick people, one of the ways to stay positive is to limit your exposure to negativity. Sometimes negativity comes from inside you in the form of negative thoughts and emotions—like fear, guilt, doubt, and shame. Sometimes negativity comes from other people. In either case, the important thing is to detach with love. Detaching with love means putting distance between you and the negative energy. When it's inside of you, you can use many techniques to shift your thoughts and energy (for example, praying, meditating, breathing, exercising, talking to someone, or deciding to think a different thought). What doesn't work is beating yourself up and adding more negative energy to the situation. When the negativity comes from someone else, it is also best to give space to the situation and the negative energy—detaching with love. If you engage the negative energy directly, it usually only makes things worse. You may find that you can shift the dynamics with people who are being

negative just by being positive. You may also find that there are people—even people who are close to you—who are attached to their negativity and don't really wish to change it. You will need to spend less time with people with “chronic negativity” because it causes dis-ease and can be contagious! Just like we wash our hands after exposure to germs to avoid becoming infected, when you have been exposed to negative energy, it is important to clean up afterwards—to recharge and replenish your positivity.



### **Questions for Reflection**

What do you do to stop negative patterns in your thoughts, emotions, and actions?

Where in your life can you practice detaching from negative energy with love?

What do you do to restore your positivity after exposure to negativity?



## 11 US TIME.

Close positive relationships with adult friends and family members add a lot to our lives. Most parents have primary relationships with a small number of people that they know have their back. These are people they trust and respect, people they know they can count on—their mother, their best friend, their significant other, husband or wife. These people are our main partners and fellow travelers in life. They are the people we confide in, get good advice from, and feel nourished by. Part of the delight of being human is the need for intimacy, for being seen and being known—and knowing and accepting someone else. Part of taking care of ourselves is spending quality time with these people—intimate time, family time, time to build and strengthen the bonds between those we’re close to. Quality “us time” can be a romantic weekend at a hotel with your husband or wife, a weekly date night, pillow talk before sleeping, a regular time to have coffee and talk with your best friend, or a weekly family dinner at your mother’s house. Many of us find that making a ritual out of “us time”—doing something regularly in the same way—becomes something to look forward to that lifts our spirits when life is rough.



### **Questions for Reflection**

How is “us time” part of taking care of yourself?

How do you let the primary people in your life know that you value them?

What “us time” rituals do you want to add to your life?



## 12 START WITH TAKING CARE OF YOUR BODY.

The physical body is the foundation for our whole existence and a healthy body is a strong foundation for a healthy mind and spirit. When we ignore our body's needs or mistreat our body (by not sleeping well, by eating poorly, by not moving and stretching, by smoking, abusing alcohol or other drugs) it is more difficult to have a healthy mind and spirit. Our body, mind, and spirit are all connected—one entity. When we mistreat our bodies, we are actively working against ourselves. Nobody says this out loud, but our bodies tell this story of our relationship with ourself to the whole world. What we look like physically is the visible, tangible record of who we are and how we treat ourselves. It reflects how we love or don't love ourselves or how we value or don't value ourselves. So staying strong and flexible requires sleeping enough, eating well, exercising, and not poisoning ourselves with toxic substances. When we take care of our bodies, we have better energy for everything else. Many times our lifestyles, our social networks, and our environment do not support good health. Staying fit and healthy physically is as difficult as staying positive

emotionally. This is especially true because some things that are really not good for us in the long run feel good in the moment. Investing in good health for the long haul is going against what most people in our society are doing. But if we are truly committed to being our best selves, it is a commitment we will make to ourselves and our families.



### **Questions for Reflection**

What is your body telling the world about your relationship with yourself?

What do you do to take good care of your body?

What gives you short-term happiness but interferes with your long-term health and well-being?

What do you need to learn in order to be physically healthier?

What are the main barriers to your good health?

What steps are you ready to take today to improve your fitness and health? What about your family's?

**13 Ask.**

We make it hard on ourselves when we think we have to do it all alone. We have lots of reasons for not letting others in: what we were taught about responsibility when we were young, experiences we've had when we have reached out, fear that asking will only make it worse, our ego, and our pride. Some of us are attached to the idea that we are the powerful, effective, reliable, competent one—the one people go to, not the one who needs. Sometimes we don't know who to ask, or we don't have anyone who we think will be able to assist us. Part of taking care of ourselves, being strong and flexible, having friends, and getting what we need requires asking. You've heard the saying "Ask and you will receive." Practice asking for what you want and need, regardless of what it is. Put what you want or need in words and start with just asking the Universe or God. Then, practice giving others the opportunity to be helpful to you. Start with little things. When you don't understand, instead of acting as if you know, ask. Get the information you need to make good decisions and think of mobilizing a team of people to assist you as you are willing to assist others.



## **Questions for Reflection**

When is it difficult for you to ask and why?

How can asking be a sign of strength instead of weakness?





## 14 PRACTICE: JUST DO IT.

Getting stronger and more flexible requires work and can be painful. Like lifting weights or doing yoga to improve your physical body, it hurts to work new muscles. Getting out of your comfort zone is ... not comfortable! The key to breaking old habits that don't serve us anymore and to awakening to our potential is practicing the new thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors that we consciously choose. Don't dwell on the things you do that take you back, the slip-ups. Just move into the future, consciously practicing and living the protective factors!



### Questions for Reflection

How do you know when you're thinking, feeling, or doing something that doesn't serve you?

How do you stay focused on the present—and building a brighter future?

What do you choose to practice to take better care of yourself?

## ACTIVITY

Get four pieces of paper. On the first piece of paper draw a circle and write “Peace and Joy” in the circle. On the second piece of paper draw a circle and write “Relationships.” On the third draw a circle and write “Assistance.”

Now go to page one and, outside the circle, write five things that bring you peace and joy. Draw a line from each one to the center. On page two, write five things that you love about relationships in your life. On the third page, without thinking about whether you can afford it or not, write what kind of assistance you or your family could use to improve your current situation.

Now on the fourth piece of paper, create a list of things you will do in the next month to bring more peace and joy into your life, to improve your relationships, and to reach out for assistance.



## **Part Two: Be a Strong Parent**

Being a Great Parent Is Part Natural and Part  
Learned (Knowledge of Parenting and Child  
Development)



## 15 BE THE PARENT.

In order to be a great parent, you first need to commit to being the parent. At times it is difficult to be the parent. It is challenging to consider our children's well-being with all the decisions we make, including who we bring into our homes, how and when we relax, or how we speak to or argue with other adults in our lives. Sometimes balancing our own needs with those of our children is tough. If we choose to do what we want to do without making sure our children are cared for, that can be trouble. We know the cases that make the news: the mom who has worked long hours all week and has had no fun for weeks. She goes out to get cigarettes and meets her boyfriend for a drink, locking her sleeping children in the house for just a few hours. A fire breaks out ... she comes home to tragedy. We may judge her, but we also know that we are not different from her. We all have close-call stories. It's one choice at a time as a parent, and making the choice to be the parent can be challenging. Other times it's difficult to be the parent when what you know is the right choice doesn't go over so well with your children. Temper tantrums, cold

shoulders, and “I hate you”s do not make us feel great as parents, but we know we have to stand for what’s right and for the vision of our children’s potential. Teaching them the right way is a process and not one that’s always going to have them showering us with affection and happy words or feeling like they’re our best friend.



### **Questions for Reflection**

When is it challenging for you to “be the parent”?

What does being a strong parent mean to you?

What are some choices you make only for yourself that don’t have anything to do with your children? How do these choices affect your children?

How do you balance your needs with those of your children?



## 16

**MAKE THE HEALTH OF YOUR CHILDREN A PRIORITY.**

In order for our children to be healthy—both physically and emotionally—they need to exercise and eat healthy foods. Statistics say this isn't happening. More and more children are seriously overweight and getting diseases, like diabetes, that used to be restricted to older people. Parents play a big role in the health of their children by providing the food that they eat and arranging for them to be active. The fact is that children can't have a healthy lifestyle unless busy parents take time to focus on promoting their health. Restricting access to fast food and processed food when children are young helps them develop the healthy habit of making good food choices. By restricting TV, internet, and videogames—and making sure children play outdoors in positive, unstructured activities—we keep our children physically and emotionally fit. Unfortunately, keeping our children healthy does not come naturally in this society. We need to work at it to have a healthy lifestyle; it's part of being a strong parent.



## Questions for Reflection

How do you model a healthy lifestyle for your children?

How are you teaching your children about good food choices and exercise?

In your experience, how is physical fitness related to emotional health and well-being?

What practices do you have in your family that promote great health for all of you?

## ACTIVITY

### Parent's Code of Honor

Write down five things you commit to doing as a parent. Write down five things you commit to not doing as a parent.



17

**THINK FIRST ... SO YOU CAN THINK FAST!**

A lot of times in life we are on “auto-pilot” and we don’t think through the consequences of our actions. We end up doing things we regret. Being conscious and aware is important to being a great parent. It requires thinking about what we do before we do it. It means taking the time to respond to situations with our children instead of just reacting. We need to make time and space to reflect in advance and decide what we want to do and how we want to be. If we do this a lot, we can be very clear about our intentions. Then, when life happens, there is a better chance that we will remember and do the right thing in the moment. There were many things our parents did that we learned from and don’t want to repeat. Doing what was done to us comes naturally. We can repeat what was done to us without thinking at all because that’s how we were “programmed.” That doesn’t mean it’s always the right thing to do. Being intentional is part of being a great parent.





## **Questions for Reflection**

What are your intentions as a parent?

What comes naturally to you as a parent that you need to watch out for?

What's the difference between responding and reacting for you as a parent?



## 18 Do AS I DO.

Some parents expect children to do what they tell them to—and punish them if they don't follow the rules. The best way to get children to show respect is to respect them. Children learn to do what we want them to do when we model it consistently. Being a parent is being a leader and being a role model—24/7! Children watch what you do and they will do what you do, regardless of what you say. It is confusing for them when your words and your actions don't match, when you send them mixed messages. For example, if you tell your kids not to use “bad words” when they are frustrated or angry and then they hear you curse when you get angry, you're sending a mixed message.



### Questions for Reflection

How do you model the behavior you want to see from your children?

What are the biggest challenges of being a role model for your children?



## 19 **KNOW WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW ... AND LEARN!**

Parenting is one of the toughest jobs on the planet and there is really no training program for it. Children are complicated—they come to us completely dependent and they develop their physical, mental, and emotional abilities over time. And they don't come with instructions! There's a lot not to know about being a parent—both about child development and about parenting strategies. Every parent has to learn. The important thing is to know that you don't know and approach parenting as a series of learning experiences. You are your children's first teacher—and they are also your teachers. In addition to learning from children, parents also learn in many other ways—from friends and family members, teachers, doctors, books, and the internet. The important thing is to be open to learning and to acknowledge when you need to learn.



### Questions for Reflection

How do you know what your child is capable of at each age?

Who do you learn from as a parent and what do you learn?

What would you like more information about as a parent?

### ACTIVITY

Get together with three other parents. Have a discussion about strengths as parents. Tell each other your strengths as a person and how that works in your parenting. Identify one strength you'd like to build on and make stronger. How will you do it? Tell each other and schedule a follow-up meeting to check in on how it goes!



## 20 BUILD ON YOUR STRENGTHS.

We feel our best as parents when we build on our strengths as people, when we are both positive and true to our best selves. If you have a great sense of humor, bring that to your parenting. If you are good at understanding how people are feeling, bring that to your parenting. If you are good at stretching a dollar, what a great parenting skill! Know who you are, what you really like about yourself, and what you are good at—and be that person as a parent.



### **Questions for Reflection**

What are your strengths?

How do you bring your strengths to your parenting?



## 21 MAKE YOUR HOME A SAFE HAVEN.

Just like relationships with our parents influence all our relationships in life, our experience of home affects our feeling of safety and peace in the world. The outside world can be dangerous and scary. Home is supposed to be a safe place, a place where you feel loved and supported, a place that is fair and peaceful, a place of nurturing and nourishment. Home is where a moral and spiritual foundation is laid. Home is where you can relax and rest and be yourself—or it is not. If home is scarier than the outside world, then kids will take their chances and try to find their peace and safety elsewhere, on the street. We need to watch what is happening in our homes. We need to look at it and feel it from our children's point of view. Then we need to take responsibility for creating an emotionally and physically safe environment that assists our children's growth and development.



## **Questions for Reflection**

Consider how your home feels from your children's perspective?

How can you make your home more peaceful?

What are the rules in your household? How do they contribute to it being a safe place for everyone?

What gets in the way of your home being a secure base and safe haven for your children? What will you do about it?



## 22 BE A TEAM.

Even the most dedicated father or mother does not raise his or her children alone. Children are influenced by all the adults who care for them—and when all those adults work together on the child’s behalf, the child benefits. Part of being a strong parent is recognizing who you are parenting with (even if you don’t necessarily want to be parenting with that person and wouldn’t choose to have them in your life now). It means making sure that, as much as possible, you are on the same team. You do this by sharing information, solving problems together, consulting with each other about what you’re going to do with or tell the child, and generally showing respect for each other. Teamwork requires good communication and cooperative relationships among the primary adults in children’s lives: parents, babysitters, teachers or child care providers, and relatives who care for them regularly. When all the people who love and care for a child are on the same team, the child gets consistent messages and feels more secure and less confused than when the adults are at odds with each other. It is easier to be on the same team with adults you



are on good terms with. It can be harder in situations where you're not on good terms with someone who is important in your child's life—like your ex, for example, or a foster parent you didn't choose. It may help to do the right thing if you look at the situation from your child's perspective. It will be better if everyone involved concentrates on doing what's best for the child and doesn't let their own issues with each other get in the way of that.



### **Questions for Reflection**

Which other adults are important in your child's life?

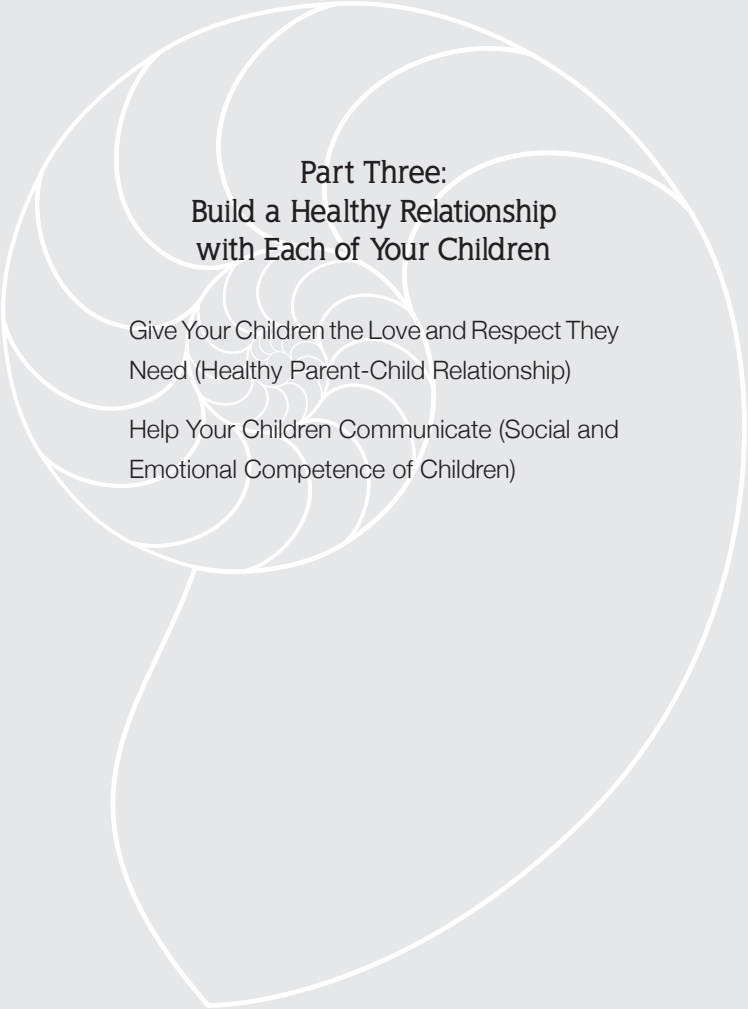
Who shares parenting responsibilities with you?

How do you ensure that you work together as a team?

What gets in the way of being a team?

How do you resolve issues between adults as they come up so that your child doesn't suffer?





**Part Three:  
Build a Healthy Relationship  
with Each of Your Children**

Give Your Children the Love and Respect They  
Need (Healthy Parent-Child Relationship)

Help Your Children Communicate (Social and  
Emotional Competence of Children)



## 23 KEEP GOING AND KEEP GROWING!

Parenting is dynamic. Life happens. Tough situations come up for you and for your children. Sometimes it can be overwhelming and scary. Sometimes it can feel impossible and sad. As parents we often feel responsible for everything that happens and frustrated that we can't make things as perfect as we'd like for our children. The good news is that perfection is not important. Children grow up healthy, productive, and happy despite their parents' mistakes. It is important to focus on rising to the occasion of being a parent every day, on solving problems, learning continually, and getting better and better. If we keep going and don't give up—on ourselves or on our kids—we keep growing and we make sure they have someone who believes in them. We also set an example for our children that, in life, what you know isn't as important as what you are willing to learn. Continuing to show up as a parent is half the battle. The other half includes: (1) letting our best selves blossom naturally as we approach parenting with an open heart and an open mind; (2) being willing to be humble enough to learn what we don't know; and (3)

forgiving ourselves for what we didn't know, didn't do, or would do differently if we had it to do again. You are good enough! Start from today and go forward, one step at a time.

## **Questions for Reflection**

Who didn't give up on you, and what difference did it make in your life?

What do you need to forgive yourself for? When are you going to do that?

What did you learn from your parents or the people who raised you that you want to pass on to your children?

How do you deal with negative emotions to keep going and keep growing?



## 24 GET TO KNOW EACH OF YOUR CHILDREN.

Every person is different—we know that about relationships in our life with other adults. We sometimes forget that when it comes to our kids. Even when children are small, they have their own personalities, needs, and their own ways of looking at things. And they have their own fears and dreams, likes and dislikes. It is important to understand that our children are people too and to treat them like human beings that we are in relationship with—people we are truly interested in getting to know, understand, and respect. We can communicate more effectively with our children if we observe them closely, see how they are, and ask open-ended questions—and pay attention to the answers. As we get to know each of our children, they will feel respected and cared for as individuals and we can encourage positive choices and behavior.



## **Questions for Reflection**

What makes each of your children feel loved?

How are your children different from you and from each other?

What do you have in common with each of your children?



## 25 LISTEN MORE THAN YOU TALK.

Sometimes as parents we think that just because we've said something, that we've achieved a purpose and something's been accomplished. We especially feel this way if we say it loudly and forcefully and we're really clear about what's going on. The opposite is often true: By talking and lecturing without listening, we build walls between ourselves and other people, including our children. As we crowd out other people's (including our children's) voices, we reduce their investment in the conversation we're trying to have. When we ask questions and listen sincerely for the answers we build bridges and make space for the other person. We get information that we didn't have. We have the potential to engage the other person in solving whatever challenge we face. Truly listening makes people—including children—feel valued and cared about. Truly listening requires being open and suspending judgment, being in the moment, and not planning what you're going to say next. By truly listening and then saying what we've heard the other person say to make sure we understand, we can turn interactions into conversations rather than arguments.



Truly listening does not only happen with the ear! Truly listening is feeling the energy behind what someone is saying and listening for what they are not saying. With small children and with teenagers a lot of listening is nonverbal and happens with senses other than the ears. Listening beyond words uses your intuition.



### **Questions for Reflection**

What keeps you from listening?

What is your experience with listening? With being listened to?

When has listening made a difference in your life?



## 26 LAUGH WITH YOUR CHILDREN.

Understanding a child's sense of humor is an incredibly powerful parenting tool for building a relationship. The joy and delight expressed by laughter is positive energy for growth—it builds upon safety and intimacy. Lightening up and enjoying life—even in difficult situations and challenging times—is a skill that can be learned, practiced, and reinforced. The added benefit of laughing is that usually it means that you're having fun too! Scientific research says that the act of laughing, even when intentionally produced without the emotions that usually accompany it, can “trick” the brain into releasing chemicals that improve your mood and functioning. Even if you are feeling serious, like life is no laughing matter, laughter can be a healing activity. So build in some time to laugh with your children.



## **Questions for Reflection**

When is the last time you had a good laugh with your kids? What was going on? How did you feel? How did they feel?

How could you bring more laughter into your family life?

What do your children find funny? What makes them laugh?



## 27 FAMILY TIME.

Everything worthwhile takes time. Earlier in this book, we asked you to block off some time for you and some time for your primary relationship. Now it's time to think about family time. Families do this in different ways. Some families are very organized and have weekly meetings. Some get together for Sunday dinner. Some go to church together or visit Grandma every week. Some families even use Skype and the computer to get everyone in the same room to talk or experience something together. Each family has different rituals and rules, but strong families spend time together when they can. Just being with each other strengthens the bonds. It's important to have positive time together as a family to build strong relationships, to know what's going on in each other's lives, and to reinforce what family means to everyone who is part of your family. When you have family time from the time children are small you create memories that last a lifetime. You build the power of family in their consciousness as a foundation of their identity and well-being.



## **Questions for Reflection**

What are your best memories of family time?

What is your family time like now?

What could you do to enhance the quality of the time your family spends together?



## 28 DEAL POSITIVELY WITH STRONG EMOTIONS—YOUR OWN AND YOUR CHILDREN’S.

Dealing with our own feelings in a positive way is one of the biggest challenges we face as human beings. Not letting them overwhelm us. Not getting carried away and acting stupid because of a negative feeling. Being aware of what is going on emotionally and making a choice of how to deal with feelings is empowering. The good and bad news is that this is learned behavior! As a parent you can assist your children with understanding what they are feeling by validating that it is normal and acceptable to have feelings. You can tell them from a very young age, “You are sad. And that’s okay.” You can then show your children healthy ways of expressing and dealing with emotions. Of course, you will be much better at doing this for them if you can do it for yourself! If your children see you having negative emotions and handling them in healthy, positive ways, they will learn from your example.



## **Questions for Reflection**

How do you deal with your own negative emotions with your children?

How are you teaching your children to deal with emotions?

What emotions are difficult for you to deal with? How can you deal with them in a better way?



## 29 PRESERVE DIGNITY.

Part of showing love and respect for other human beings is taking care not to embarrass, humiliate, or shame them. Your children develop healthy self-esteem when they view you as someone who has their back—who will support and protect them. If you do that but you also undermine them in other ways, you send a mixed message. If you tear them down, you damage their trust in you. It is difficult to build a strong, healthy relationship on that foundation. As with every other behavior, you set a stronger example if you are consistent and the rules apply to all people in the household. When children see you respecting yourself, acting with dignity, and being treated that way by people close to you, they learn that respect and dignity are a human right and that to behave otherwise is emotionally abusive.





## **Questions for Reflection**

How do you show your children that you respect them?

What role do shame and embarrassment have in your past? Your present? Your future?

What does dignity mean to you and how do you express it?

Do you treat your children differently in public than in private?



### 30 CHECK YOURSELF.

If we want our children to have self-discipline and self-control we need to model it. We need to understand that self-esteem—feeling good about yourself—is directly related to having respect for yourself and being able to stand behind how you act. Many of us are burdened by mistakes we have made that we have a hard time forgiving ourselves for. We spend a lot of time and energy hating ourselves because we have said or done things we feel bad about. There's a solution for this: it involves forgiving ourselves for our past mistakes. It really only works if we commit to doing things differently in the future and stick with that commitment. If we don't, we get trapped in a cycle of abuse where we are both the abuser and the victim. So, the real solution is to make fewer mistakes! In order to make fewer mistakes in our relationships with others, including our kids, we need to develop consciousness and awareness. We can learn to take a moment before we say or do anything, to decide what we want to do. The goal is to respond instead of react, to catch yourself before you do or say something you regret. By doing so, you'll avoid

putting more negativity out into the world and you'll preserve the most important relationship you have: the one with yourself. Checking yourself is part of taking care of yourself and nurturing your relationship with your children.



### **Questions for Reflection**

How can you have a better relationship with yourself?

What is the role of discipline and self-control in your life?

What gets in the way of unconditionally loving and respecting yourself?



## 31 TRUST YOUR KIDS.

One of the greatest gifts anyone can give another person is trust. Trust is a vote of confidence. If you trust another person, you know that they are good. You know that they can do it. Just by the simple act of trusting, you invest positive energy and assist them with achieving their potential. It doesn't matter how small or big, old or young, capable or incapable a child is—you can still give them trust, just like you can give them love. Trust is a choice. Some people are stingy with trust and they give their trust from a place of fear and lack—they're always questioning whether another "deserves" their trust or "has earned" their trust. Trust needs to come from a place of abundance, from a place of trust in yourself and the Universe. Like love, trust is a universal energy that we tap into and can channel. Doing so makes positive outcomes much more likely than withholding trust. To keep trusting when someone has let us down is a challenge. With kids, one of the greatest gifts you can give them is a constantly renewed trust. If you choose to trust your children, they will strive to live up to that trust and it will become a strong energy

in your family. The reverse is also true. Energetically, trust is connected to abundance, prosperity, and faith, but doubt is connected to fear and lack. We all want to live in families and communities that are filled with abundance, prosperity, and faith. One way to do that is to continually practice trusting in each other.



### **Questions for Reflection**

What are your trust issues?

How is love like trust?

How do you feel when someone trusts you? When someone distrusts you?

Why is trust important in a relationship with children?



32

**ASK EMPOWERING QUESTIONS.**

As a parent, one of the best ways to help your children communicate and to build a strong relationship with them is to ask empowering questions. An empowering question is one that is open-ended: you don't already know the answer to it. An empowering question is asked from a place of curiosity. It allows the person you're asking to think and perhaps to travel to a new place in their mind. It puts them in touch with their own power. Yes or no questions are not empowering because they stop thought and they stop conversation. Questions that start with why? how? what? are empowering. When you ask an empowering question, you are coaching your children to find their own answers. When you give advice or ask leading, closed-ended questions, you impose your ideas on another person and seek to build your own power or authority. Love Is Not Enough Parent Cafés are based on asking empowering questions and agreeing to create space for others to answer: no advice, put-downs of self or others, telling stories about people other than ourselves, or interrupting are allowed. These agreements make it

so that participants can hear themselves and get in touch with what they think and feel about an issue. This works in families too!



### **Questions for Reflection**

How is being a parent like being a coach?

What gets in the way of you asking empowering questions with your children?

How important is it for a child to feel powerful and why?

### **ACTIVITY**

Next time your child has a challenge or a problem, practice asking empowering questions until he or she finds a solution.



33

**ENERGY ATTRACTS LIKE ENERGY.**

With all relationships, and especially with your relationship with your children, energy attracts like energy. You can affect the relationship by being conscious of the energy you bring to it. If you are positive, hopeful, and encouraging you will bring out that same energy in them. Or, if they are committed to being negative, they will spend a lot of time in their room! Your power is your energy. The best way to build the family you dream of, the positive relationships with your children that you desire, is to attract it with your own energy.

**Questions for Reflection**

How can you be more mindful of your energy and how it is expressed?

What is your energy like in relationship to your children?

What is your energy attracting in your life?





## 34 FIND THE TIME AND THE PLACE TO TALK.

We often ask the question in parent cafés: how do you talk so your children will listen and how do you listen so your children will talk? One of the consistent answers we get from participants is about the importance of finding or creating times and places to talk. With small children, this often means taking time when you are with them and intentionally starting a conversation, at their level, while making eye contact. With pre-teens and teenagers, parents say it's about seizing opportunity—like in the car—and having a few questions ready. Communicating through conversation is important to developing a strong relationship. In a very real way, the conversation is the relationship!



### Questions for Reflection

When are the best times to speak with your children?  
Where do those conversations happen?

Think about the last conversation you had with your child. What does it say about your relationship?

How could you and your children have better conversations?



## 35 TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOURSELF.

We come full circle. The theme of this chapter is Build a Strong Relationship with Each of Your Children. In order to do this, you need to have a good relationship with yourself—this involves taking good care of yourself. When you take good care of yourself, you have better energy for all relationships. You are also less needy in your relationships. When you take care of yourself, you take full responsibility for yourself. You get energized from your Source. You have love and positivity to give abundantly and you are a source of joy, hope, and peace for your children and your family. When you take care of yourself you are also less stressed and less likely to react or overreact in ways that damage your relationships—including your relationship with each of your children.



## **Questions for Reflection**

How are you different with your children when you are under stress and when you're not?

What does you taking care of yourself teach your children?

How can not taking good care of yourself damage your relationship with your children?



# Parent Cafés

Love Is Not Enough Parent Cafés will change your life and strengthen your family! These three evenings of conversation deal with topics that are important to every parent:

1. Taking Care of Yourself
2. Being a Strong Parent
3. Building Strong Relationships with Your Children

Parent cafés take place at daycare centers, schools, community organizations, churches, businesses—places where parents feel welcome.

Parent cafés are free for participants. The sponsoring organization provides childcare and food to participants.

How are they different from regular conversations? At the parent café, parents use a tried-and-true process and a set of questions to draw out the thoughts, feelings, and experiences they need to talk about. Having these conversations helps build six protective factors that keep your family strong. Most important, the parent café process includes follow-up, leading to real change in your life, your family, and your community.

You'll feel safe talking about difficult things at parent cafés, because

they're all about bringing difficult situations and emotions to the surface, bearing witness to each other, and building the strength we need to be good parents. To make sure that happens, parent cafés create a safe environment where participants:

- Speak from their own experience, using "I" statements
- Listen attentively and don't interrupt
- Don't put anyone down
- Refrain from giving advice
- Keep confidentiality

Couples and parents who know each other join separate conversation groups so they can speak freely and get a fresh perspective.

Trained parent hosts help everyone get the most out of the conversation. Parents also organize, facilitate, and plan parent cafés and train other parent leaders. If you are a parent, you can become a trained, paid parent leader through Strengthening Families Illinois.

To come to a parent café or to host one in your area, visit [www.strengtheningfamiliesillinois.org](http://www.strengtheningfamiliesillinois.org) or [www.bestrongfamilies.net](http://www.bestrongfamilies.net).

# Conclusion

**“There are no problems or challenges, only opportunities.”**

Who needs the protective factors? The point of this book is that we all do. We start with the understanding that the issue of protecting our children has many dimensions. We all have bad days and have done things that we regret. And all of us have the potential to abuse and neglect ourselves—and, by extension, our children—because of the choices we make in our lives.

We could go further and suggest that chronic, low-intensity abuse and neglect of ourselves and those we care most about are actually common in our society, which tends to value stuff over people and to run on conflict and competition. As a society overall, we are not a healthy bunch right now—as statistics on physical fitness of our youth and adults tell us and as we can see by looking around at ourselves, our friends, and our neighbors. For some of us, suffering is just life. It can actually seem more common for people

to be angry or to feel oppressed and powerless than to feel like empowered, responsible masters of our own destiny. It can seem more common to feel afraid and to struggle for survival than to feel wealthy, blessed, and joyful to be alive. To me, this is sad—and also not necessary.

The point of this book is to get unstuck. We need to realize we have the power to turn it all around and to have the family life we dream about. We can do this by starting with ourselves and our families. We can do this by moving our lives in a positive direction one step at a time—starting with how we think about things—and being conscious and in control of our energy. We can do this by living the protective factors!

### **How do you live the protective factors?**

When our families are strong and our children are doing well, it's because we're building and strengthening the protective factors in our households. When we're tearing down protective factors, it has negative results for our children and our families. When we're struggling, we can use the protective factors to get to a better place.

So far in this book, we've talked about three main aspects of the protective factors: 1) taking care of yourself, 2) being a strong parent, and 3) building a healthy relationship with each of your children. We've presented lots of strategies, ways of thinking, and activities that will build protective factors in each of these areas.

You can also take a more direct approach to living the protective factors. Start with an issue that's causing you or your family trouble and look at how it relates to the protective factors. Ask: How could I address this situation using the protective factors? How does this issue relate to resilience, and what can I do to build resilience? How does it relate to positive social connections? What about concrete support in times of need? And so on. When you use them this way, the protective factors come to life and become a framework for understanding what's going on, for breaking it down, and also for moving in a positive direction—toward strength and healing.

It's also interesting to just take a look at your family through the lens of the protective factors—a kind of inventory: what's going on here?

### **Building the Connection Between Strength and Love**

This can also be difficult. When Dr. Jamilah R. Jor'dan, a renowned early childhood expert and professor of child development at Chicago State University, lectures on the protective factors and strengthening families in her classes, she says there is often “not a dry eye” by the end of the class. Why would this be the case? I think it's because when things are going well, we build protective factors without even really thinking about it. So when we're not building protective factors, there's a reason. That reason can be our own pain. It can also be our strategies for distracting ourselves from our pain. It can be postpartum depression. It can be the way that our experiences from our childhood affect our lives (because science tells us—and our experiences bear it out—that negative childhood experiences create pathways in our brain that reinforce negativity in the ways we think and act.) It can be because of how hard life is right now, what surviving takes out of us. It's important when life gets overwhelming to remember that, as the Buddhist proverb says: “Pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional.” You have the power to change your experience of your life.



For many, this change starts with compassion. It is so important to have compassion, to open our hearts. Usually when we think of this, we think about serving and nurturing others. But the first step is actually having compassion for yourself. To open your heart to yourself and love yourself—as if you were someone wiser, stronger, kinder, more beautiful. Because, actually, you are!

Love is so important. It sustains us, connects us, encourages us, and strengthens us. We know you love your kids and you want more than anything to be a good parent. We also know that love is not enough to keep your family strong.

Be Strong Families / Strengthening Families Illinois is committed to developing many ways for parents to live the protective factors. As this book goes to press for the first time, we've created a workshop called **Living the Protective Factors**, which goes factor by factor and brings them to life. During the workshop, you apply the protective factors and develop a plan for building them with your family. We also have a transformational workshop journey called **Awaken to Your Potential:**

**As a Person, As a Parent, As a Leader**, which works on maximizing positive energy to direct your life; clarifying your vision; setting and achieving your goals; and developing leadership by motivating and inspiring yourself and others to action. We host parent cafés and Café Talk so you can get together with other parents, ask questions, and find answers—and build friendships in the process. We are building websites and an online community through Facebook to connect parents who are living the protective factors and committed to strengthening their families.

We invite you to join us! Strengthen your family from the inside out by living the protective factors—within yourself, in your household, and in the community.

With love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Goetz Wolf". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kathy Goetz Wolf

## About Kathy Goetz Wolf

Kathy Goetz Wolf ([kathy@beststrongfamilies.net](mailto:kathy@beststrongfamilies.net)) is the visionary co-founder, energetic leader, and executive director of Be Strong Families and Strengthening Families Illinois. She brings to this work 20 years of experience in the family support field and offers a unique perspective and skills as an iPEC-trained life coach, kundalini yoga teacher, and cultural anthropologist. She is also the co-creator of Awaken to Your Potential: As a Person, As a Parent, As a Leader—a transformational process that assists people in maximizing positive energy to direct their lives, clarify their vision, set and achieve goals, and motivate and inspire themselves and others to action.



## About Be Strong Families and Strengthening Families Illinois

**Be Strong Families** serves parents and those who want to work in partnership with parents to build the protective factors. Be Strong Families grew out of the Strengthening Families Illinois network of parent leaders, which has mobilized thousands of parents to strengthen families in their communities. We know you're doing great work to strengthen families, and we want to recruit you!

**[www.bestrongfamilies.net](http://www.bestrongfamilies.net)**

**Strengthening Families Illinois** is a statewide movement to embed six protective factors that keep families strong in systems that serve children and families, including early childhood education and child welfare. SFI provides resources, training, and networks to build families' protective factors. At SFI programs, staff and families are partnering to keep children safe and families strong.

**[www.strengtheningfamiliesillinois.org](http://www.strengtheningfamiliesillinois.org)**















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