



Strengthening Families™ Maryland Parent Cafés: An Overview

Strengthening Families Maryland Parent Cafés are structured opportunities for parents of children ages 0 - 5 to come together and talk with one another about topics which can help to keep their families strong. Patterned after the Be Strong Families/Strengthening Families Illinois Parent Café model, which have been successful in Illinois since 2007, hundreds of parents throughout Maryland have now participated in Strengthening Families Maryland Parent Cafés. Based on the five research-informed protective factors that have been identified by the Center for the Study of Social Policy to build family strengths and help reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect, Parent Cafés are a peer-to-peer process which engage parents in meaningful conversations and provide significant opportunities for parent engagement and parent leadership. Maryland Family Network coordinates Parent Cafés state-wide, using a capacity-building approach in local communities to train and provide resources to Parent Café Facilitators.

What Happens at a Strengthening Families Maryland Parent Café?

Parent Cafés are generally two hours in length and include a meal or substantial snack. The Café begins with an introduction to the protective factors, followed by structured one-on-one conversations to help participants feel comfortable talking with one another. Participants then gather in small groups with several discussion questions provided. With the support of a trained Parent Café Table Host, participants explore questions by talking, listening and reflecting for a total of three rounds. Parents rotate to different tables for each round, so they have an opportunity to meet different people each time. After these conversations, a debriefing and wrap-up closes the Parent Café.

What are the Benefits of Parent Cafés?


During Parent Cafés, parents are introduced to the protective factors and provided an opportunity to think about how they build those factors in their own families. Post-Café evaluations and anecdotal data collected by Be Strong Families/Strengthening Families Illinois and Maryland Family Network indicate that Parent Cafés may help to:


- ❖ Reduce stress / increase peace and well-being
- ❖ Build protective factors
- ❖ Facilitate meaningful relationships and bonding / community-building
- ❖ Increase parenting knowledge & skills
- ❖ Provide opportunities for parent leadership

Of Strengthening Families Maryland Parent Café participants last year, 98% said the Parent Café was helpful to them and 97% said they would attend another Parent Café. In addition, as a result of participating in the Parent Café, 93% said they will be more willing to ask for help when they need it, 98% said they plan to take better care of themselves, and 95% said they learned something that will help them as a parent.

Participants in one Strengthening Families Maryland Parent Café shared this about their experience:

- *It helped me to be a better mother and to better understand my children's needs.*
- *I learned that it is beneficial to talk about one's problems with others, it makes one feel better about themselves, and that it is not good to keep your feelings bottled up, it only makes you feel more isolated.*
- *It helped me to be a better person, by better considering things I can make better decisions for my home and my loved ones, and to be more positive.*
- *What did we learn? To love ourselves more in order to better love others.*

Coordinated by Maryland Family Network 

Strengthening Families Maryland Parent Cafés are a Be Strong Families  Parent Café model.