

# **Integrating System Concepts with Mixed Research Methods to Evaluate Systems Change in Child Welfare Initiatives**

**August 30, 2011, Washington, DC**

**2011 National Child Welfare Evaluation Summit**

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# Mixed Research Methods to Evaluate Child Welfare Initiatives

# Integrating System Concepts with **Mixed Research Methods to Evaluate** Systems Change in Child Welfare **Initiatives**

# What is a System?

**What is an example of a system?**

# What is a System?

A system is an interconnected set of elements that is coherently organized in a way that achieves something.

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# In Social Systems:

- **Perspectives/Paradigms shape system structures and patterns.**
- **Dynamics include a mix of controlled and self-organizing dynamics.**

# Protective Factors

- **Social Connections**
- **Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development**
- **Concrete Support in Times of Need**
- **Parental Resilience**
- **Social and Emotional Competence of Children**

# Theory of Change in Paradigms, Structures, and Conditions of Complex Systems

## Strengthening Families

### Example Points of Influence

	Baseline Understanding <i>To what extent:</i>	Trying Out Interventions	Tipping Point	Sustainable Adaptive Balance
<b>Caregiver-Child</b>	Are families aware of and practicing protective factors? Is social support building protective factors? Do parents use both organized and adaptive dynamics?	Families test use of protective factors and determine changes in relationships and boundaries in daily life. Families learn to self-assess use of protective factors.	Enough families are habitually using and building protective factors that family norms are shifting in support of protective factors. <i>Outcomes being achieved.</i>	Caregivers are connected with other caregivers and family members who are skilled at using and building protective factors. Family norms support protective factors. (Evidence of well being of families and levels of child maltreatment are regularly monitored.)
<b>Neighborhood/Community</b>	Are neighborhoods and their leaders building social cohesion around protective factors? Do they encourage adaptive dynamics? Organized dynamics?	Neighborhoods pilot new ways of functioning that are grounded in protective factors and social cohesion.	Neighborhoods & leaders commit to use and build protective factors. They leverage organized and adaptive dynamics. <i>Social cohesion being achieved/ supported.</i>	Neighborhoods & leaders adjust to social conditions in community and emphasis on supporting protective factors. They consider and reflect on their ways of functioning. (Evidence monitored.)
<b>Organization/Programs (Learning/Capacity Building)</b>	Do learning activities address protective factors? Are learning activities designed to model adaptive dynamics? Organized dynamics?	Learning activities redesigned and tested with greater attention to protective factors and use of more interactive, peer-to-peer learning and learning from families.	Communities of practice grounded in peer-to-peer learning and application are common; include reflection on balance of protective and risk factor attention in different contexts.	Knowledge development dissemination and integration woven into practice with learning activities and communities of practice used to shore up challenging areas. (Practitioner knowledge and practice regularly assessed.)
<b>Organizations/Programs (Policy, Norms, Support Structure)</b>	Are organizations/programs designed around building protective factors? Do programs encourage adaptive dynamics between workers and families that support protective factors?	Organizations/programs pilot new ways of operating that are grounded in protective factors. They determine cost implications.	Organizations/programs commit to redesigned programs/structures that incorporate protective factors. Programs & structures leverage organized and adaptive dynamics. <i>Outcomes being achieved/ supported.</i>	Organizations/programs use outcome and other data to adjust to social conditions in community with emphasis on supporting protective factors. Organizations/ programs put high priority on leveraging both adaptive and organized dynamics.
<b>Policy &amp; Social Norms (Local, state &amp; national)</b>	Are policies, norms based on encouraging protective factors? Are policies attentive to both organized and adaptive dynamics?	Policies, norms adjusted with engagement of multiple voices, perspectives, valuing of protective factors.	Policies, norms overall predominately encourage building of protective factors. Policies leverage both organized and adaptive dynamics. <i>Outcomes supported.</i>	Policymakers balance attention to risk and protective factors tailored to micro-contexts. They adjust policy features that affect system fundamentals and dynamics over time based on data systems to maintain grounding in protective factors and related new knowledge.
<b>Organizational Connections/Partnerships</b>	Are connections built to encourage protective factors? Do connections support adaptive dynamics? Organized dynamics?	Entities, including ones not formerly involved, explore formal and informal connections to build attention to protective factors.	Key partners have multiple inter-connections that encourage attention to protective factors on a micro and macro level. Attention to protective factors is fundamental to connections.	Partners use data feedback to strategically shift connections to respond to contextual changes to ensure primary attention to protective factors. Shifts are based on attention to boundaries, relationships, perspectives, and system dynamics.