

Get Started

Families know what they want and need in life.

When all members of a family work together, they can set goals and create plans to successfully establish and maintain their stability and well-being. The Whole Family Approach provides adults and children in the family with the tools and social support to collectively set life goals, create actionable plans, and achieve those goals.

This family-led strategy is effective in a range of settings — rural, urban, and suburban — and enables families to work together to realize any number of goals, ranging from education and health to financial stability and relationship building. Each community's approach will look a little different, but the core steps should remain the same.

Below is a guide to implementing the Whole Family Approach so your organization can start the vital work of empowering adults and children in your community to strengthen relationships, establish stability, and reach their full potential together.

Step 1: Connecting with Families

Families are paired with a coach and identify goals

1A. Form a collaborative.

The Whole Family Approach is best implemented through a mission-driven collaborative model where multiple agencies come together to provide holistic services. Identify organizations in your community that can provide families with services complementary to those provided by your organization. For example, one organization might specialize in child education, another in health care, another in financial planning, and another in vocational training.

Consider partnering with organizations you already have a productive relationship with. Agree on a memorandum of understanding outlining each organization's role and collaboration processes in order to best function as one organization with a shared mission. Together, you can form a supportive network to meet the varied needs of all family members.

TIP: In creating your collaborative, consider completing the following:

- ✓ **Create a shared mission:** A mission statement provides direction, focus, and accountability, not just for you, but for your team. While each organization in the collaborative will already have its own mission, creating a new one for the collaborative will reinforce what you hope to accomplish together.
- ✓ **Set SMART goals:** Establish clear and measurable goals for the collaborative.
- ✓ **Develop an operating budget:** Data gathering should be electronic and accessible to all

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- ✓ **Develop data collection, sharing and storing tools:** Data gathering should be electronic and accessible to all collaborators. Align your collection tools with any required reporting from donors.
- ✓ **Determine how you will track family's progress.**
- ✓ **Create a service delivery model.**

1B. Train family coaches.

Coaches, also known as family advocates or mentors, play an essential role in guiding families to identify their priorities, take action to achieve their goals, and connect with the appropriate social supports and tools. These individuals must be trained in how to provide family-centered coaching that empowers families to decide on their own priorities for the future. Coaches may be hired as full-time or part-time employees.

TIP: Coaches have an easier time building trusted relationship with families when they are well-regarded members of the same community.

Learn more here: <https://theprosperityagenda.org/familycentered-coaching>

1C. Identify families eligible to participate in the Whole Family Approach program.

Begin outreach to recruit families to participate in the Whole Family Approach program. Identify where families congregate in your community and decide how to gain visibility in these spaces. This could take the form of short presentations or flyer distribution at schools, places of worship, and other community centers. Also consider how you can build off of existing relationships with families that are accessing services across organizations in your collaborative. During outreach, provide families with a quick overview of what the journey ahead will look like.

TIP: Use [this infographic](#) to walk families through the steps their family will go through to achieve their goals. Share examples of goals other families have set for themselves, the plans they put in place to achieve them, and the results they saw across the whole family. Demonstrate how individual and family-wide goals overlap, as do financial, educational, professional, and health goals.

Research shows that families with at least two dedicated adult caregivers yield the best outcomes for the children in the family. As a result, a core component of the Whole Family Approach is ensuring that all participating families include two adult caregivers. These two adults may include a combination of parents, grandparents, grown children, other relatives, or close family friends. Ideally, at least one of the caretakers must be working or able to work.

Although the Whole Family Approach does not have any income requirements, the program's focus is primarily on working, low-income families who are living paycheck to paycheck — and connecting those families to the supports and tools they need to become thriving members of the middle class.

TIP: If a family only has one dedicated adult, support them in identifying someone within their network who can fill the role of second caregiver. More often than not, a second caregiver can be identified and become an integral part of the family's journey to achieving their goals. Families that find themselves struggling in life may have isolated themselves, so identifying two caregivers can be an opportunity to repair, rebuild, and strengthen relationships with family and friends.

1D. Pair families with a coach.

Once a family has joined the program, dedicate time to learning more about their hopes and dreams for the future and what challenges they want to tackle individually (both adults and children) and as a family. After identifying some initial goals and getting to know the family, it's easier to pair the family with a coach who may share a similar life experience or cultural background. This is a collaborative effort between the coach, your staff, and families to determine a pairing that works for everyone.

TIP: Host informal events for mentors and families to get to know one another. This gives each the opportunity to see how they interact and connect with one another. Building a trusted relationship is extremely important to the family's success.

Step 2: Set family goals

Children, caregivers, and coach identify steps to achieve interconnected individual and family goals

2A. Get to know the family and explore goal setting.

From the first meeting with the family, give clear expectations that this program is about the family setting their own goals and moving forward with a plan to meet those goals. Start by getting to know the family's story and talk in-depth about their lives and aspirations, family dynamics, health, education background, etc.

Throughout the discussion, one or two clear immediate goals will likely emerge. Discuss these goals with the family and how each family member's behaviors factor into it. Many goals require the effort of more than one person to be accomplished. Families don't always recognize this on their own, so providing concrete examples and real-life connections is always helpful.

TIP: Identifying life goals can be a challenge if you've never thought about planning for your future before. Share examples of goals that other families have worked on in the past, and review personal, family, short-term, and long-term goals with them. Demonstrate how individual and family-wide goals overlap to benefit the entire family, as do financial, educational, professional and health goals. Encourage participants to recognize the small and momentous goals they have already achieved, such as immigrating, committing to a partner, finding and keeping jobs, having and supporting children, learning English, etc.

TIP: If you have multiple families joining the program at once, consider running a goal-setting workshop where participants learn how to set short-, medium-, and long-term SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound) goals. And always remember to use tools that are culturally appropriate to your community.

2B. Set individual and family-wide goals.

Once a solid rapport and relationship has been established with a family, encouraging them to set goals comes much more naturally. It's not always easy — many people have to shift from a mentality of survival to one of thriving, but when people trust that they matter to the providers and agencies who are serving them, they are willing to take steps they might not have otherwise. As the family considers their goals, emphasize that these goals are to help them solve concerns they have now and ones they anticipate down the road.

The Whole Family Approach can be used to assist families in achieving a wide variety of goals. The coach will support the family in identifying one to two priority goals. These will likely be a combination of individual and family-wide goals that overlap. Below are a few key areas the Whole Family Approach is particularly effective in improving outcomes.

- **Foster children:** Improving the lives of abused and neglected children by improving their academic performance and support network
- **Education for youth:** Promoting positive youth development programs in schools that incorporate services for individual students, small groups, teachers, whole classrooms, parents, and families
- **Neighborhood revitalization:** Improving the quality of life for whole families through a combination of informal group and individual case management and community development
- **Immigrant assistance:** Strengthening the immigrant, working-class population by providing training/support to whole families to promote well-being, financial stability, and self-sufficiency
- **Education for adults:** Providing resources, coaching, and formal training for adults in the family to improve their family's economic growth, health, overall well-being, and support network

Step 3: Family Action

Family members use resources, tools, and support networks to accomplish steps toward goals

3A. Translate goals into short-term objectives.

The coach plays a vital role in guiding adults and children in the family to break down their ambitions into smaller behavioral objectives that will move them closer to their goals. Setting a large life goal can seem overwhelming to some. Breaking the goal down into smaller, more manageable steps for each family member can feel more achievable.

For example, a goal might be for a parent to find a better paying job. The objectives then might be: 1) Access additional job training; 2) Find child care in order to attend job training or different working hours; 3) Access support to update resume; and 4) Meet as a family to discuss parent's job goals.

3B. Connect families to tools, services and social support.

Importantly, the coach will help connect the family to social support, tools, and other resources in their community that can help them achieve these objectives. Many of these tools and resources are accessible to the family through the collaborative. This makes the collaborative a one-stop shop for all family members to receive the support they need to reach their goals collectively.

The types of tools and services families may need access to will vary widely depending on their goals and may include: relationship building classes, entrepreneurial skills classes, physical, mental and emotional health services, afterschool programs, English as a second language classes, job training, financial planning, and more.

Examples of when families may benefit from additional social support include accessing childcare, celebrating family accomplishments, overcoming family challenges, securing family transportation, celebrating holidays and more.

TIP: Families are more likely to thrive when they are socially engaged with their community.

A strong social support network is an essential component to achieving goals, enabling families to weather difficult times, adapt to change, celebrate victories, and maintain hope that they can build the future they dream of. Furthermore, when families know they can speak openly to their coach about their struggles and successes toward their goals, this can mean the difference between abandoning their efforts persevering in the face of adversity.

TIP: Some collaboratives set up a community center where they offer joint programs and services. This communal space serves as a focal point for the program where children can access after-school tutoring/academic enrichment programs, families can gather for monthly bonding activities with each other and their coach, and families can meet with their coaches to discuss their progress.

Step 4: Agency Collaboration

A team of agencies connected to the coach provides holistic, coordinated support

Share data, insights, and progress on family action plans.

Working as a Whole Family Approach collaborative breaks down silos in existing social services. It puts equal priority on the needs of adults and children in the family and enables seamless collaboration among multiple organizations to holistically support a family's plans for the future.

As a collaborative, agree to a shared reporting system that allows coaches and service providers to easily update and share progress data for each family. This enables the collaborative members to adapt to the families' progress and emerging needs, creating a responsive rather than reactive system.

Step 5: Success

Families achieve and maintain their goals, assuring stable and healthy futures

5A. Enter the maintenance phase.

Each individual and family will achieve their goals at a different pace. For some, it is a two-steps-forward, one-step-back process. The coach has the important role of continuously encouraging families to keep working toward their goals and adjusting their plans when needed along the way. Once a family or individual achieve all their goals, they enter the maintenance phase.

In this phase, the coach checks in with the family on a quarterly basis or as needed by the family to see if they are maintaining their goals. This might be in-person or over the phone.

5B. Identify new goals.

During the maintenance phase, explore new goals family members may be interested in.